History from the Bottom Up and the Inside Out
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Published by Duke University Press

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History from the Bottom Up and the Inside Out: Ethnicity, Race, and Identity in Working-Class History.


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I don’t know that people who are professional thinkers or philosophers or students do all the thinking; perhaps other people who are at work have an opportunity to think that the others have not got. — ANTON JOHANNSEN, WORKING-CLASS ANARCHIST, 1905

On a late spring day in 1905, Hutchins Hapgood walked into the saloon in the Briggs House Hotel, a hangout for Chicago labor activists. He was looking for someone he had never met, only imagined. “Before I went to Chicago, I had in mind what I wanted to find,” he later recalled. “I felt certain that, somewhere in that turbulent world of labor, there must be a man who stood at the center of all the converging elements and who was at least dimly conscious of the development of a labor philosophy. I felt certain I would recognize him if I came into contact with him.” He found that person in Anton Johannsen.

This unlikely pair produced a most remarkable book, The Spirit of Labor (1907), a mixture of a worker’s personal narrative with a study of the radical labor movement at its most developed and volatile, in early twentieth-century Chicago, though the book’s voice is most often that of Hapgood.
Here I consider this rare personal relationship between two very different men from two very different backgrounds, their motivations in the project, and the broader context of class conflict which shaped their collaboration, along with some of the elements of working-class life in early twentieth century Chicago that Hapgood missed in his evocation of radical labor, and what might be viewed as a kind of “working-class modernism.”

Hutchins and Anton

The two men inhabited very different worlds at the beginning of the twentieth century. Born in Chicago in 1867 and raised in the Mississippi River town of Alton, Illinois, Hapgood traced his family back two centuries to the Massachusetts Puritans. His father, a progressive businessman educated at Brown, was the first in the family to have left Petersham, Massachusetts, in many generations. With ancestors on both sides in the American Revolution, one a Tory and the other a revolutionary who served in the Continental and U.S. Congresses, Hutchins Hapgood could hardly have been more deeply rooted in American myths and traditions. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa near the top of his class at Harvard. At a time when a small minority of Americans went to high school, Hapgood went on for a master’s degree and then taught English at Harvard and the University of Chicago. His subsequent life, one of literature and leisure, was spent in travel around the world or settled in Greenwich Village, Dobbs Ferry, New York, Tuscany, Provincetown, or Key West. 

His brothers were equally remarkable. William Powers Hapgood (1872–1960) launched the Columbia Conserve Company, a cooperative factory and experiment in industrial democracy that featured a workers’ council and profit-sharing, and dedicated his life to a range of reform causes. Norman Hapgood (1868–1937) built a successful career as a progressive journalist and served as ambassador to Denmark. A nephew, Powers Hapgood (1899–1949), worked for many years as a miner and joined the Socialist Party after graduating from Harvard. He went on to be an important organizer for the United Mine Workers of America and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and a leader of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the late 1930s and 1940s.

Raised in this environment, Hutchins Hapgood became that rare bird—a well-educated WASP elite who questioned not only his own privilege but the system on which it rested. “I am helped by a whole set or system of circumstances which have nothing to do with my individual value,” he wrote his friend Mabel Dodge Luhan. “It is unjust that I should have so many privileges.”
In his writing and in his personal life, Hapgood looked toward a new kind of society based more on human worth than personal privilege. For a generation he remained at the center of radical intellectual life in the United States. A key figure in both Mabel Dodge’s Greenwich Village salon and in the Provincetown Players, a radical group at the very cutting edge of modern theater, he was a close friend and collaborator of playwrights Eugene O’Neill and Susan Glaspell; writers Floyd Dell, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, and Sherwood Anderson; artists Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O’Keefe; and journalists John Reed, Louise Bryant, Lincoln Steffens, Anna Strunsky Walling, and Walter Lippmann.5

Like so many turn-of-the-century workers, Anton Johannsen was an immigrant. His father, a roofer with little education, fled the rural poverty of Germany for the small-town poverty of Clinton, Iowa, where he first worked as a brewery teamster and then prospered briefly as a saloon keeper. With little formal education, Anton left school early and went to work in a brick and, later, a window sash and door factory. He left town on a boxcar at the age of eighteen and educated himself while tramping around the country and working at a variety of jobs. It was this travel and the people he met while traveling that provided him with what might be called a “blue-collar cosmopolitanism”—a new world of ideas and a tolerance of, even an interest in, that which was different, new. A literate hobo “intellectual,” Anton’s “first real friend,” introduced him to socialism as well as the social structure and culture of the open road. He met Greenhill, a follower of freethinker Robert Ingersoll, in an Iowa furniture factory. The old man lent him copies the Truth Seeker and Tom Paine’s The Rights of Man, which Anton read many times over and aloud to his wife, at the time a devout Lutheran. Both became skeptics, atheists, and freethinkers.6

In this at least, his cosmopolitan attitudes actually paralleled Hapgood’s, though the men developed their values and ideas in very different settings. “Life on the road,” Anton concluded, “with all its chance meetings with many men and ways of living makes one tolerant of everything except tyranny.”7 At the end of the nineteenth century, he settled down with his wife and children in Chicago, where he earned his living by day in a woodworking shop, led his local union, and became active in the city’s labor federation and anarchist circles. Like Hapgood, Anton was driven by his own “spirit of protest,” which pressed him to consider some broader context for his own life and those of the working people around him.8

While their collaboration on The Spirit of Labor might seem strange, by the time they met in Chicago, both men had already made a habit of crossing
the kind of social boundaries that separated them. Even in his shop or union meetings, Anton was the cosmopolitan worker, the one likely to bring in an anarchist book or a free thought newspaper, to strike up a conversation about the meaning of life or the need for women’s suffrage. His intellectual curiosity, his thirst for ideas drove him beyond his workplace and his union. His days might be spent making window or door frames, but his evenings were likely to include conversations with artists, poets, and influential reformers. Nor were such exchanges simply a matter of the humble worker soaking up ideas from his social betters. What struck Hutchins Hapgood about Chicago, on the contrary, was the degree to which the opposite seemed to be the case, that middle-class and elite people were stimulated by and absorbing ideas from the labor movement. In the university, the settlements, even in business and professional life, Hapgood noted, the details of daily life “show in a hundred implicit ways the degree to which the radical ideas of the common people have affected all grades of society. . . . Most radicals are either working people or else persons who have come in contact with the feelings and ideas evolved by the laboring class, and have come to express them.”

Surging forward in Chicago and elsewhere at the turn of the century, “the spirit of labor” seemed to pull all else in its wake. For a bright worker like Anton, this situation meant, among other things, considerable contact with middle-class and elite “radicals.”

Working-Class Life from Two Vantage Points

Hutchins Hapgood was one of the intellectuals drawn by this spirit. Like some other young writers and artists of his generation, he took his interest in the immigrant worker, the street merchant, and petty criminal “past genteel amusement to a conviction that meetings with social ‘others’ might not simply entertain but foster more fully realized selves.” For Hapgood, this quest for self-realization through contact across the class divide began in 1897 when he took a job as reporter with the New York Commercial Advertiser, edited by the soon-to-be-famous muckraker Lincoln Steffens. Journalism was the closest Hapgood ever came to a vocation, and he worked on and off at it for the next two decades. Aiming for a newspaper that was a cut above the common fare, Steffens assembled a group of talented young writers who recognized the human drama at work in the city and rendered it with a literary flair unusual in the mainstream press. The Advertiser was lyrical by the newspaper standards of the day. The writers around Hapgood and his brother Norman were drawn by the excitement and beauty they found in
city life. They saw “murder as a tragedy rather than a crime,” historian Moses Rischin writes, “a fire as a drama rather than police news, pushcart traffic as a vibrant pageant rather than as a nuisance.” Their observations appealed to an inquisitive public who wanted to peek across the ‘Social Gulf,’ historian Christine Stansell concludes, “without actually straying into the territory themselves.”

Over the next two decades Hapgood produced literally hundreds of columns embracing a striking panorama of urban life for various papers in New York and Chicago.

Hapgood was particularly drawn to the Lower East Side, and he produced wonderful columns evoking the community created there by the burgeoning population of poor Russian and Eastern European Jews. His wife Neith Boyce, also a reporter at the Advertiser, convinced him to combine these pieces into The Spirit of the Ghetto (1902). Never a great success in its day, Spirit of the Ghetto now stands as a minor classic of immigrant life. In a pattern he often repeated in his early career, Hapgood was able to penetrate the life of the Lower East Side only with the aid of native collaborators, in this case the socialist editor Abraham Cahan of the Yiddish Jewish Daily Forward and the brilliant artist Jacob Epstein, who produced dozens of drawings for the book.

After publishing The Autobiography of a Thief (1903), Hapgood shared the proceeds from the book with Jim Caulfield, the petty thief whose life provided its substance. He did the same with his next two books involving collaborations across class lines.

The conditions under which Hapgood and Anton produced The Spirit of Labor tell us a great deal about both the authors and the book. Hapgood had intended to use Anton’s life story to capture the energy and pervasive influence of Chicago’s organized working-class movement, to offer someone like Anton as an archetype of the new working-class radical. He had used this autobiographical strategy successfully in The Autobiography of a Thief. But quickly he came up against the clear-cut differences between the genres of bourgeois and working-class autobiography. Hapgood had trouble getting Anton to focus on his own story and even getting him slowed down long enough to talk at all. When he did talk, Anton wanted to discuss the union movement, politics, and strikes. Such tendencies were typical of worker autobiographers in many countries, and they suggest the influence of social class on notions of self and identity.

Whereas Hapgood himself and other middle-class intellectuals might place the emphasis on the individual and his or her search for the self, workers’ narratives tended to be told very differently. They often subordinated the
personal to the social and political, and described themselves as what one scholar has termed “social atoms”—more or less representative pieces of a much larger whole. Particularly with labor radicals, the movement and not the self was the focus of the narrative.\textsuperscript{15} There was an individualist anarchism abroad in the early twentieth century, but Anton, an ideological eclectic in any case, was clearly drawn by the ideas of anarcho-communism, which emphasized the social and collective over the self, and social movements over individual acts of terror.

At a more practical level, Anton was far more concerned with his life in the movement and was reluctant to take time away from that for what he tended to view as the bourgeois enterprise of autobiography. “He felt I belonged to another class,” Hapgood recalled, “and that my motives were probably profoundly suspect.”\textsuperscript{16} He absorbed a certain amount from simply visiting with Anton and his family and observing him at large in the city, and he was sometimes able to question Anton at length in meetings at Hapgood’s own room. Such meetings were productive, Hapgood wrote his wife from Chicago, but “he is nervous about having to give up many of his trade union meetings. I have many problems connected with him—how to hold him and his interest as well as how to get and use the material.” “I can get a good thing from Johannsen,” Hapgood concluded in another letter, “if I can keep him up to the work. He is restless, wants to go to his meetings, etc.”\textsuperscript{17}

For these and other reasons, Hapgood chose a more biographical approach, hoping to place Anton in his element and, in the process, bring some notion of the labor movement to middle-class readers. Although Hapgood’s book is essentially a biography, extensive quotations from Johannsen convey something of the thinking of a radical worker. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these quotations convey Anton’s unalloyed worldview. Not only did the interviews, the questions Hapgood asked, and the way he chose to ask them all reflect his own interests and biases, but the words themselves come from Hapgood’s notes. These have not survived, but it seems unlikely that they represented a verbatim rendering of Anton’s words. None of this reduces the value of \textit{The Spirit of Labor}, but it is worth considering when we ask ourselves what the text represents. The two men worked together on the book, but clearly it was conceived and conceptualized by Hapgood. Thus, what he brought to the book was at least as important as what Johannsen brought to it. Hapgood’s choices in constructing the narrative can tell us as much about the world of a radical intellectual as they can about the world of a radical woodworker.
Inspired as much by the personal as the political lives of the workers he encountered in Chicago, Hapgood produced a second book, *An Anarchist Woman* (1909), which told the stories of his friends Terry and Marie Carlin, working-class anarchists who appear at several points in *The Spirit of Labor.* Hapgood’s telling of Terry and Marie’s love story represented his special interest in the love lives of such proletarian radicals. As Christine Stansell notes, “*The Spirit of Labor* eroticized the subject of labor and the figure of the radical workingman, striking a connection between working-class life and sexual license. Hapgood set out to describe the ‘expressiveness’ of the American workers and that expressiveness turned out to be, in good measure, a superabundance of sex. The democracy that beckoned across the class line was erotic as well as industrial, a liberalized regime of heterosexual love.” Hapgood’s account does little to dispel a common confusion about the notion of what has come to be called “free love.” A principled position against any legal restraints on individuals’ sexual habits, the position had roots in American reform movements of the mid-nineteenth century, though it was more common at the turn of the century among immigrant working-class anarchists. Contrary to popular conceptions about sexual promiscuity, it neither prescribed this nor precluded monogamy. The emphasis was on individual freedom in this and other realms of one’s personal life. Free love in this sense became a strong principle among bohemian intellectuals as part of a more general revolt against bourgeois morality. By his own account, Hutchins Hapgood learned the free love ethic from Chicago anarchists; it was a habit he continued to embrace for much of his life.

Working women play a frustratingly minor role in Anton’s personal narrative; his was in many ways a man’s world. Yet we do get some intriguing glimpses of their lives. How and why were the lives of women radicals different from those of the male workers around them? Radical women like Marie Carlin and Emma Goldman struggled to build not only a new world, but also a new way of life for themselves. In their relations with the men in their lives, as much as in their relations with urban elites, they fought for a place in the world, and they did so outside the mainstream women’s rights movement. Trade union activists like Margaret Haley of the Chicago Federation of Teachers demanded their place in the burgeoning labor movement, but their criticisms were not confined to their male labor colleagues. They also demanded that their sisters join this class movement and support male unionists.
The most intriguing female figure in Anton's narrative is his wife, Maggie. A “typical working-class housewife” to middle-class observers, perhaps, Maggie turned out to have her own ideas. Hapgood left little room for her in either *The Spirit of Labor* or *An Anarchist Woman*, perhaps because in her personal life she was what he considered a rather typical wife and mother, perhaps because he was largely blind to her personality. The writer dwelled instead on a number of single female anarchists and their active love lives. Maggie Johannsen, like her husband, was a freethinker and a labor radical. She supported the work of the Women’s Trade Union League as time allowed, but caring for a household and children, she lacked the opportunity to engage the outside world as Anton did. In midlife, Maggie realized her lifelong dream of being an artist. She took a course at Chicago’s Art Institute and created a series of portraits of women who had contributed to labor and the welfare of working-class families—Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, Mary Dreier Robbins, and others. Any older woman “has the right to develop her talents and interests,” she told an interviewer. Her story reminds us of the hidden aspects of the spirit of labor.

The Class War

One problem with *Spirit* is that Hapgood was so absorbed with Anton’s and others’ personalities that he often failed to establish the broader context required to understand the labor movement, and the particular context was crucial in this case. If, as Christine Stansell suggests, New York was the soul of the intellectual bohemian phenomenon of the early twentieth century, the crucible for literary and intellectual modernism, then Chicago was, as Hapgood recalled in his memoir, “the heart of the radical labor movement in America.”

Both social reformers like Jane Addams and writers like Jacob Riis and Hapgood himself were moved by the enormous social distance at the turn of the century between the nation’s native middle-class population and the ocean of immigrant poor. Riis addressed this problem in his book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), Addams founded Hull House (1889) as a kind of beachhead for middle-class culture and values in the heart of Chicago’s West Side slums, and Hapgood sought to explain the radical labor movement to middle-class reformers and intellectuals through *The Spirit of Labor*. Nowhere was the social gulf characterizing U.S. cities in this era greater than in Chicago; nowhere were workers more fully organized or more class conscious. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the city’s diverse working-class communities had created the strongest and most progressive labor
movement in the United States. A series of epic political and industrial conflicts, including both the Haymarket tragedy (1886) and the great Pullman strike (1894), accentuated the social chasm between the immigrant working class and the city’s elites. Yet the greatest drama might well have resided not in such dramatic episodes, but rather in the quotidian class war played out in the streets of Chicago and other industrial cities and towns.

We are also introduced to the underground world of the proletarian intellectuals, worker-radicals who sought to transform the world through an anarchism that remained embedded in the lives of Chicago’s workers. In the late nineteenth century, the city had produced one of the strongest anarchist labor movements in the world. The background for the Haymarket tragedy of 1886 was a rich subculture of labor radicalism rooted in the city’s ethnic communities and ranging from trade unionism and the reformist Knights of Labor to Marxist socialism and the anarchist International Working Peoples Association, a potent force on Chicago’s proletarian scene. In the midst of a demonstration during the great May 1886 strike for the eight-hour day, an unknown bomber killed several policemen and workers and touched off a “red scare” aimed at suppressing the city’s radical movement. The political repression following this tragedy undoubtedly weakened that movement, but The Spirit of Labor shows that it never really died. Much smaller, it was vibrant at the moment of Hapgood’s visit. And more than its predecessor, which was strictly a working-class and largely male affair, this turn-of-the-century anarchist movement crossed the boundaries of sex, class, and nationality.

Hapgood missed dimensions of the even more radical wing of the labor movement in The Spirit of Labor. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), that quintessentially American radical labor organization, was founded in Chicago the very summer he visited. One might have expected him to encounter the IWW, a new revolutionary industrial union organization with considerable anarchist influence in its early years, as he made his way in Chicago’s labor circles in the fall of 1905. One founder of the new labor organization, Lucy Parsons, was at the center of anarchist activity in the city. Yet Lucy, the wife of Albert Parsons, the central figure in the Haymarket story, is not even mentioned. She personified whatever link remained between the Haymarket movement and the one Hapgood found in Chicago two decades later. One possible explanation for this gap in the story is the existence of two rather distinct anarchist subcultures, one focused more on the world of unions and strikes, the other focused more on cultural phenomena. In fact, at the moment of his visit, a major controversy split the Chicago movement between
a more culturally inclined group that soon left for the Home Colony in Washington State and a more industrially inclined group around Lucy Parsons that continued to work on the city’s West Side and to focus on unions, strikes, and working-class politics.

The Best-Organized City in the World

While the 1890s are often considered the pinnacle of class conflict in the United States, the level of union organization and strike activity actually increased in the following decade. In 1903 alone, Chicago unions doubled their membership and launched 251 strikes. By September of that year, the Chicago Federation of Labor boasted more than 243,000 members, over half of the city’s labor force, and the breadth of the movement was even more impressive than its size. It embraced not only building tradesmen, railroad workers, and a broad range of unskilled male operatives in heavy industry, but also 35,000 female factory workers, scrub women, waitresses, and four thousand of the city’s elementary schoolteachers. The reproduction of class sentiments in the city is suggested by the fact that schoolchildren, prominent in many strike photos of the era, organized their own “skilled pupils unions” and strikes in support of their unionized parents and teachers. Union organization and strikes spread throughout Chicago at the turn of the century as the movement passed from an older generation of German, Irish, and native-born skilled workers to the thousands of unskilled “new immigrants” pouring into the city’s mills, foundries, and factories. The Arbeiterzeitung, the city’s main German-language working-class newspaper, declared the city the “trade union capital of the world.”

Chicago’s movement reflected a broader growth in the size and ambitions of American labor at the turn of the century. From 1897 to 1904, union membership soared from 447,000 to more than two million. The American Federation of Labor tripled in size between 1900 and 1904, and unions also became far more aggressive. From their typical numbers of 1,000 to 1,300 in the mid-1890s, strikes rose to almost 3,000 in 1901 and nearly 4,000 in 1903, with an increasingly large proportion of these conflicts won by unions.

Chicago was engulfed in severe class conflict at the moment Hapgood set out to capture the essence of American labor radicalism in the spring of 1905. The Chicago Employers’ Association had launched an all-out campaign against the unions in a bid to rid the city of this “tyranny” and to run the place “open shop.” The key target in this offensive was the powerful teamsters’ union, which represented the linchpin in the city’s movement for several reasons.
Made up of 35,000 blacks, native-born and immigrant Irish, and workers from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds, they had managed to build an unusually powerful movement, employing their wagons to stop traffic in what came to be termed “street strikes.” As historian David Witwer notes, “The nature of the teamsters’ trade and the geography of the early-twentieth-century city made non-union vehicles vulnerable.” Strikebreakers attempting to navigate congested city streets were attacked by large crowds drawn from the city’s densely populated working-class neighborhoods. In return, the teamsters seemed ever-willing to support other groups of workers in sympathy strikes that became endemic in the city around the turn of the century.25 Doctors at the County Hospital labeled the teamster “the roughest, toughest scrapper of the working classes.”26 The teamsters’ power was particularly obnoxious to the city’s large merchants. One them predicted in the spring of 1904 a confrontation between Chicago’s militant unions and its increasingly class-conscious employers. “Some day,” he declared, “the unions and the business community will have to fight it out to see who owns Chicago.”27

As the economy dipped and unemployment rose in the summer and fall of 1904, the Chicago Employers’ Association launched an ambitious (and quite successful) open shop drive. By July of that year, the city was convulsed by ninety-two strikes and lockouts involving 77,000 workers. The net effects were disastrous, particularly in the city’s largest factories. Strong organizations of largely unskilled immigrant workers at Illinois Steel, International Harvester, and in the slaughtering plants at the giant Union Stock Yards were completely destroyed. As with the great upsurge at the turn of the century, the decline of the Chicago unions mirrored a national trend. From 1904 on, in the face of a massive and well-coordinated open shop drive, union growth stalled, AFL membership actually dropped briefly, and the numbers of workers involved in strikes declined precipitously, with workers tending to lose an ever-larger proportion of those strikes. While employers had launched an open shop campaign in the city’s building industry as early as 1900, the cataclysmic struggle for the Chicago unions came in April 1905 during a massive and violent teamsters’ strike. Hapgood did his first round of research in the midst of this dramatic conflict, which highlighted for him and other observers the high degree of class feeling in the city’s immigrant working-class communities.28

Graham Taylor, a liberal minister and settlement house reformer, was struck by the pervasive and violent class consciousness which he saw all about him.

It was the disclosure of the intensity and intolerance of class-conscious feeling prevailing not only among those on both sides who were im-
mediately involved in controversy, but as pronouncedly throughout one whole class as the other . . . our non-union neighbors . . . became as class-conscious, almost overnight, as were the striking teamsters. . . . [M]en from the sidewalks, women from the tenement-house windows, and even the little children from the playground, cried with one voice, “Down with the scabs,” some of them hurling any missile at hand at the frightened drivers. . . . [T]he “solidarity of labor” extends beyond the membership of unions. . . . [O]n occasion the class-conscious spirit emerges from the whole working class, expressing the personal claim to the job as inviolate. 29

In such situations, Jane Addams observed, “the entire population of the city becomes divided into two cheering sides. . . . Any one who tries to keep the attitude of non-partisanship . . . is quickly under suspicion by both sides.” 30 Like Jane Addams before him, Taylor was saddened by what he saw as a form of intolerance. Settlement house reformers like Taylor and Addams dedicated their lives to building social and cultural bridges between immigrant workers and the more “respectable” elements in the city’s population. Strikes enlarged the chasm between social classes in a particularly dramatic fashion. To his credit, Hapgood saw the pervasive class-consciousness of early twentieth-century Chicago in very different terms. “I was impressed over and over again, when living among the mechanics,” he wrote, “with a certain kind of altruism, of a fairly wide-spread emotion of solidarity, akin to the religious; for when men band together in an effort to attain things they deem necessary to their deepest material and spiritual welfare, they are not far from conceiving of the movement, at least in moments of self-consciousness, as being from one point of view religious.” 31 Even Addams agreed that the “most valuable result” of the mass strikes involving immigrant workers was “the expanding consciousness of the solidarity of the workers.” 32 The highest principle in working-class subcultures, Hapgood concluded, was that of “organized solidarity.” Upon this, all else depended.

Hapgood told a story that illustrated the extent of such sentiment in the city at the time. Friends introduced him to a hardcore criminal who calmly recited a long litany of his violent and rather degraded activities. Raised in a working-class neighborhood, he retained friends in the labor movement, though he lived most of his life in the city’s underworld. “Here,” Hapgood thought, “was a man whom it was not possible to insult. He probably had no sensibility.” Yet when the author asked if he had ever acted as a scab or
worked on the side of corporations during strikes, the man’s feelings were genuinely hurt. “Oh, no,” he said. “I may be bad, but I’m not as bad as that. That is against my principles.”

A Working-Class Modernism?

If Chicago was the heart of industrial radicalism, it was also the vital center of a vibrant working-class intellectual and cultural life that shaped not only the lives of the city’s workers but also the social, cultural, and political life of the city as a whole. It was the convergence of this labor and cultural radicalism, a kind of proletarian modernism that Hapgood sought to capture in his study of Johannsen and his world. The essence of the “modern,” Hapgood believed, lay not in his own group of déclassé radical intellectuals, as many writers at the time and since have assumed, but rather in people like Anton and his friends. “I feel he is really nearer the truth of the immediate future than I or any of my leisure class friends,” Hapgood wrote his wife Neith.

Chicago’s strong free speech traditions went back to Haymarket and well before, but there were also more recent traditions. Hapgood found that Jane Addams ran “a kind of salon” at Hull House, “an exchange of ideas where all the surging social conceptions find expression.” At dinners and public forums in the old house on Halsted Street, one might indeed find some of the leading writers and artists of the day, but they would be rubbing elbows with Women’s Trade Union League activists, immigrant anarchists and socialists, labor organizers. Christine Stansell notes that New York drew off many of the most talented Midwestern writers and artists who might otherwise have raised literary and artistic standards in Chicago, but the bohemian scene that remained, and it was an extremely dynamic scene, was much closer to working-class radical politics and culture than its New York counterpart. The city’s “Bughouse Square,” Radical Bookshop, Ben Reitman’s “Hobo College,” and later the Dill Pickle Club seemed to meld bohemian intellectuals and working-class activists, politics, and art, more easily than comparable New York venues. These Chicago institutions and others like them were far more open than Mabel Dodge’s Greenwich Village salon, attracting many of the era’s leading literary lights and artists to spaces they shared with anarchists and socialists and more typical migratory workers.

Drawing on his relationships with Robert Morss Lovett and the novelist Robert Herrick, both friends from Harvard now teaching English at the University of Chicago, Hutchins made extensive contacts among Chicago’s intellectual circles and immersed himself in the city’s remarkable cultural life. He
developed a close relationship with the radical lawyer Clarence Darrow and met with the economist Thorstein Veblen to discuss The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York, 1899). He also spoke often with settlement house reformers Jane Addams and Graham Taylor, University of Chicago sociologist W. I. Thomas, and other intellectuals. A regular “Lunch Group” included Algie Simmons, editor of the Chicago Socialist, Lovett, and writers I. K. Friedman, Raymond Robins, and William English Walling. “In fact,” Hapgood wrote to Robert Herrick, “Chicago is full of good humans.” While in Chicago, Hapgood read Kropotkin’s Memoirs of a Revolutionist (Boston, 1899), Oscar Wilde’s The Soul of Man under Socialism (Boston, 1910), and other books “along an anarchist line.” But he also had no trouble meeting a range of labor activists including Con O’Shea, president of the teamsters, a number of other teamsters, the garment workers’ leader Abraham Bisno, and several of the leading figures in the Chicago Federation of Labor, as well as anarchists Ben Reitman, “the Hobo Doctor,” Hippolyte Havel, and Emma Goldman. The radicalism he evoked derived less from the texts than from experiences and the culture surrounding them.

The Mainstream

The radical modernism of Chicago’s intellectual elite and professional reformers, the bohemian radicalism of the city’s “proletarian intellectuals,” the tough idealism of its labor activists, and the almost “religious” class solidarity of much of its working-class population—Hapgood illuminated each of these worlds for his readers, but there was another world that he never penetrated during his time in Chicago, perhaps because he never looked for it.

Anton Johannsen was certainly not a “typical” early twentieth-century urban worker, if such a person had ever existed. He was an anarchist radical at a time when most Chicago workers continued to support one of the two main parties; a free love advocate at a time when most working families held to traditional family values; a sophisticated cosmopolitan in an era when most working-class people organized their lives around their local communities; an atheist freethinker at a time when the city’s churches and synagogues were full. Anton’s story does convey a radical dynamic that was a vital part of working-class life in these years, but it does not capture the everyday experience of millions of immigrant workers and their families.

The rather bewildering ethnic diversity of the city and others like it eluded Hapgood and other middle-class writers of the time. Chicago’s broader working-class community was fragmented into dozens of ethnic subcultures.
Between 1880 and 1930, as the city’s labor force grew by 600 percent, a massive migration drew more than 600,000 people from around the world into the city’s shops and factories. By the time of the Great Depression, Chicago had the largest Polish, Scandinavian, Czech, Lithuanian, and Slovak, and the third largest Italian populations of any city in the United States. Even at the turn of the century, Chicago had a substantial African American population, some of them integrated into the labor movement Hapgood observed, others marginalized by it. In the World War I years and the twenties, this original black community and the “new immigrants” who arrived in Hapgood’s Chicago years were joined by tens of thousands of black migrants who fled the Deep South to escape the worst aspects of Jim Crow segregation and organized racial violence, and to take advantage of the opportunities for industrial employment that cities like Chicago provided.39

What was true in Chicago in these years was also true for many other industrial cities in the Northeast and the Midwest: Millions of unskilled immigrant workers met black (and, later, Mexican migrant) laborers on the streets and in the workplaces of American cities. What difference would this have made in Hapgood’s telling of Anton’s story? As early as the time of Hapgood’s research and writing, this momentous meeting of immigrant and African American was already breeding cooperation and solidarity in some places and massive conflict in others. In the course of 1904 and 1905, for example, large strikes at the stockyards, among the teamsters, in the city’s restaurants, and elsewhere all involved the fundamental issue of the integration of black workers along with recent immigrants. In a real sense, the future of the labor movement in countless industrial communities throughout the country depended upon the resolution of what the great black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois called the central problem of the new twentieth century—the race issue.40

One part of the story Hapgood missed, then, in concentrating solely on the world of labor radicalism and ignoring the ethnic and racial diversity of Chicago, is the rather compelling story of the ways in which the city’s workers strove to cross ethnic and racial lines to create a strong working-class movement—their failures as well as their successes. For him, it seems, the central question was one of class and not race. Yet for workers on both sides of the color line, race could not be ignored. Little more than a decade later (1919), the city exploded in violence, wrecking much of its interracial labor organizing and distorting its race relations for decades.

Distinct ethnic cultures shaped the lives of many of Chicago’s workers. Each community sustained a wide array of religious, cultural, social, and economic institutions, and many immigrant and black workers in Chicago
and elsewhere lived rich lives within the contours of such networks. The cultural and intellectual lives of the city’s myriad ethnic communities remained opaque to most writers of the era. Each sustained a wide array of institutions—reading circles, play groups, choruses, bands and orchestras, a cultural panorama beyond the purview, or perhaps the interest, of the educated middle class. Indeed, the music that left its deepest mark on the city, for example, was arguably not that of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but rather the jazz and blues that percolated from black bars and cafés over the first half of the twentieth century.

Religion was particularly important in many of these communities, yet we find no recognition of such ethnic subcultures in The Spirit of Labor. They were not on Hapgood’s radar, and Johannsen himself was actively hostile to them. In a sense, the emphasis on community that made Hapgood’s earlier book The Spirit of the Ghetto such a captivating work is largely missing here. It is as if he was so taken with the spectacle of widespread class solidarity that he missed the conspicuous ethnic, religious, and racial divisions among Chicago’s workers. How might a consideration of these parallel worlds change our image of working-class life? Such communities offered alternative values and perspectives to both those of elite and corporate cultures and also those espoused by radicals like Anton Johannsen.

Life Itself

For all the social distance between these men, Anton and his world had a profound effect on Hapgood. “The last two months have meant a great deal to me,” he wrote to Neith Boyce in late 1905.

They have made me see the real sadness of things more deeply than I did before and they have removed the last vestige of snobbishness and “class” feeling that I had. My relations in the past years with thieves, vaudevillians, etc. etc. seem now to me quite unimportant, socially. But these working people and the radical atmosphere in which the thought of the working class results—this seems significant to me in a tremendous, almost terrible way. . . . [They] fascinate, please, sadden, and excite me.⁴¹

Neith Boyce, writing to their friend Robert Morss Lovett, reported in early 1906, “Hutch has been here five weeks now and has talked steadily for about four weeks. He did have some fearful and wonderful experiences in radical Chicago. When he got here he seemed to feel that he had been rudely torn from the one spot on earth where he really desired to root himself.”⁴²
As his biographer concludes, “Hutchins Hapgood discovered labor in Chicago.”43 He had already shown a marked sympathy with common people and outsiders of all kinds, and a radical disposition. Raised by an antibusiness businessman father, he was steeped in an alternative intellectual culture. But until his visit to Chicago, he had little sense of either the labor movement or radical labor politics. The Lower East Side evoked in Hapgood’s *Spirit of the Ghetto* was certainly saturated with a vibrant Yiddish radicalism, but this culture remained largely divorced from New York’s unions and English-speaking radical world at the end of the nineteenth century. Anton’s world sensitized Hapgood to a working-class critique of modern capitalism and won him over to a support for labor that persisted throughout his life. Writing of the labor ethic he discovered in Chicago, he recalled in the late 1930s, “my own consciousness and therefore my life was [sic] affected by it. I had always sympathized with the underdog. But now I began to give more serious endorsement to the philosophy of those who have not.” “As I look back upon my long life,” he wrote in 1939 in the midst of a new era of labor insurgency, “I find there is only one faith that burns in me as brightly or more brightly than ever. That is what may be called roughly the faith in the labor movement.”44

Their lives after their collaboration on *The Spirit of Labor* suggest the remaining distance between Hutchins Hapgood and Anton Johannsen, the ways in which these two radicals shared deep human experiences, and how their respective class positions determined their futures. Having gathered all of this “human material” in the heart of Chicago’s labor and radical communities, Hapgood finished *The Spirit* in New York in 1906, and then read the proofs for the book at a villa in Florence, leaving the slums of Chicago far behind.

For several years after, Hapgood was very productive. He continued to write newspaper columns on a vast array of subjects and collected some of these in another book on the “lower classes,” *Types from City Streets* (New York, 1910). *The Story of a Lover*, a book on his relationship with Neith Boyce, was not published until 1919, but, in fact, he wrote it in 1914. An early commercial success, *The Story of a Lover* was confiscated by the New York City Police Department’s Vice Squad. Although the book was ruled nonpornographic, Hapgood attributed its slumping sales thereafter to the scandal. He finished his only play, *Enemies*, which he coauthored with Neith, in 1915.45

From about 1914 until at least the early 1930s, Hutchins Hapgood struggled with depression. He produced little journalism and no major works. It seems likely that whatever tendencies he might have had toward depression and alcoholism were severely aggravated by the death of his eldest son, Boyce
Hapgood, in the 1918 influenza epidemic. “For years,” Hapgood wrote, “Neith and I were unable in any full measure to live either in work or with our children.” While Neith Boyce wrote her way out of her own depression to some degree with *Harry* (1923), a book based on her dead son’s personality and life, Hutchins seems never to have recovered from the tragedy. Hutchins Hapgood died on November 26, 1944, and was buried in Petersham, Massachusetts, his family’s home for almost three centuries.

Anton Johannsen suffered his own tragedies, but remained deeply enmeshed in the labor movement. He served as state organizer from 1909 to 1914 for the California Building Trades Council and was indicted along with J. B. and J. J. McNamara of the Structural Iron Workers for a dynamite campaign aimed at antiunion employers in the Los Angeles area. Although Johannsen was never tried for these offenses, the indictment hung over him for two years. The McNamara brothers were placed on trial in late 1911, while labor anarchists David Kaplan and Johannsen’s close friend Matt Schmidt fled. Eighty thousand unionists and socialists met in Chicago to protest the indictments. Johannsen traveled throughout the United States raising funds for the legal case, and Clarence Darrow came to California to defend the brothers in court. Johannsen and workers throughout the country were outraged when the McNamaras confessed to dynamiting the *Los Angeles Times* building. Convinced, apparently, that his plea would avoid further repression, James McNamara later insisted on his innocence. Kaplan and Schmidt were tracked down and sentenced to long prison terms. The trial’s outcome ended the prospects for a Socialist Party victory in the Los Angeles municipal elections, and also led to a precipitous decline in the state’s union movement. In the midst of this tragedy, Johannsen’s young daughter died; he and his wife buried her in the family’s yard. Although he certainly had what Hapgood once called a “dynamiting mind” in terms of his intellectual radicalism, it seems unlikely that Johannsen was directly involved in the violence. The government apparently concurred, as the charges were eventually dropped.

Still an anarchist, Anton spent much of the rest of his time bringing organizations to life. He served as a general organizer for the carpenters in California from 1914 to 1917, and as an organizer for the Labor Defense Council the following year. In 1918, he returned to Chicago, where he worked for seven years as business agent for the carpenters’ district council. During the Red Scare period, 1919 to 1922, he was elected chair of the Chicago Federation of Labor’s Organizing Committee. The federation’s progressive president, John Fitzpatrick, trusted and worked closely with Johannsen without regard to politics, as he did with Chicago communists and a host of other radicals in
the early twenties. When he last wrote Hapgood in 1933, the liberal Democratic Governor Henry Horner had appointed Anton to the state’s Industrial Commission. “[I]f by chance you ever come to Chicago,” Anton concluded, “I could probably give you plenty of material for a new edition of the ‘Spirit of Labor.’”49 Toward the end of his life, between 1935 and 1946, Johannsen achieved his highest office in the labor movement, serving as vice president of the Chicago Federation of Labor.50 Anton Johannsen died in Chicago on February 9, 1951, and was buried in Waldheim Cemetery near the monument honoring the Haymarket martyrs and alongside numerous other activists associated with the city’s rich history of labor radicalism.51

Considering Anton Johannsen’s reading habits, listening to his insights about social and personal relations, the state of the world, and various matters of ethics and aesthetics, it becomes more difficult to think of him any longer as simply a pair of strong arms or even a “class-conscious worker”—though this label certainly applies. He forces us to ask if there is an “intellectual history” far beyond what we normally associate with that term, a world of ideas and values created and exchanged in the working-class neighborhoods, factories, saloons, and other common spaces throughout cities like Chicago. And if such a world of ideas and values did exist, how does that change our understanding of working-class people in the industrial era?

Again, the particular context for a study of class relations, and especially of working-class intellectual and cultural life, makes a difference. Hutchins Hapgood and Anton Johannsen both stressed Chicago’s deep and expansive class consciousness. Yet, while the city might have been unusual in the extent to which such consciousness pervaded every aspect of its life, certainly class divisions and working-class organization had become characteristic of American cities by the end of the nineteenth century. In terms of a vibrant working class full of literature, music, and theater, New York’s Lower East Side during the era of massive Russian and Eastern European Jewish immigration may well be a better example than Chicago. But both the level of class conflict and the resonance of radical labor ideas and culture were much more widespread in early twentieth-century Chicago.

Like our own, Anton’s world intersected with many others, and such intersections provide us a fascinating window onto relations between the social classes. There are, of course, the worlds of the trade union activist, racketeer, and reformer. One boundary crossed—in the collaboration that produced this book as well as in saloons and meeting halls around working-class Chicago—was the one that separated “proletarian intellectuals” from people like Hapgood. Hutchins Hapgood and other bohemian radical
intelligents were caught between classes that were at war with one another in the early years of the twentieth-century city. And they were “in-between,” not only in the sense of their divided sympathies and sensibilities, not only in terms of lifestyle, but also in the sense that these “modern radicals” were trying to forge a new way of living and a new way of looking at the world around them.

The story of Hutchins Hapgood and Anton Johannsen and their relationship suggests other features of social class in the early twentieth century. Perhaps most importantly, it illuminates a vibrant world of radical cosmopolitan worker-intellectuals as interested in ideas and culture as they were in creating an effective working-class movement. Indeed, their practical goals were linked to their interest in these ideas. It also suggests a juncture between this world and that of the radical middle class, the world of the bohemian intellectual. The persistence of such hybrid class cultures in New York, Chicago, and other cities around the country suggests that the roots for American bohemianism lie as much in the working class as among young writers and artists.

For all their affinities, however, Johannsen and Hapgood were very different people, and the gulf between them was never quite bridged. The distance was not simply a matter of social and economic inequality, though it is difficult to overstate the impact of such forces in shaping individual lives. It was also a matter of how one viewed culture. Many radical intellectuals embraced a modern culture and values for their own sake, and because these outlets offered a way to break with a bourgeois world they despised. For working-class cosmopolitans like Anton, the significance of ideas and values lay in their promise to liberate people and to provide the basis for a new society without class distinctions.