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Peter Ystad Benjamin

The Universal to the Material:  
Social Citizenship, a Politics of Becoming and New Deal Labor Organizing in Chicago

Meatpacking

Peter Ystad Benjamin

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**Abstract**

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Peter Ystad Benjamin

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Charles Williams

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The body of literature surrounding the concept of social citizenship developed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in order to address social inequality in Western democracies. The concept drew on human rights literature to argue that states should indeed provide a modicum of social and economic security to their citizens. Social citizenship literature has been the basis of many studies on the institutionalization of the welfare state, and some scholars have suggested that such social policies have in large part discriminated against some on the basis of race, class, gender and other social characteristics. How might we understand citizenship while recognizing the social inequality present within political and social institutions? A transformative model of citizenship must recognize that the formation of the citizen-subject is a social process. The

citizen-subject is a reflection of the actions of the state *and* the rest of society. Although inequality is experienced by many citizens within political and social institutions, I argue that we can still identify those points at which citizenship is performed by citizen-subjects who articulate new forms of ‘being’ within their everyday lives. I further show how citizens engaged within social movements and group organizations participate in a process of becoming that reflects social citizenship. In particular, I showcase how changes in group formations develop through a politics of becoming organized in the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) of Chicago from the years 1918-1940. By participating in a politics of becoming, groups of citizens put forth new articulations of being that have an effect on our material world through group performances of social citizenship.

*Keywords:* citizenship—social aspect, a politics of becoming, United States New Deal, 1933-1939, United Packinghouse Workers of America, labor unions and similar organizations

## Table of Content

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: U.S. Citizenship, the Social Realm, and a Politics of Becoming.....	7
Citizenship Rights and Social Governance.....	7
U.S. Citizenship and the Exercise of State Power over ‘the Social’.....	12
Citizenship, Social Movements, and a Politics of Becoming.....	24
Chapter Two: New Deal Labor Organizing, Movements, and a Politics of Becoming.....	28
U.S. Citizenship and New Deal Labor Organizing.....	29
Unionism, the Question of Empowerment, and Movements.....	39
New Deal Labor Movements: Towards a Politics of Becoming.....	41
Chapter Three: Chicago Meatpacking, the PWOC, and Citizenship.....	44
Chicago and Meatpacking: A Brief Overview.....	46
The Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee.....	64
Citizenship, the Packinghouse Workers, and a Politics of Becoming.....	85
Conclusion.....	85
Bibliography.....	91

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## Introduction

Social citizenship theories have grappled with ways to envision the eradication of social injustice by focusing on the reduction of economic inequality within Western democracies. Policies that address socio-economic inequality within particular countries have been rooted within moral and political claims for the protection of individual rights. Through social policies such as social security, unemployment insurance, welfare, and labor protections, individuals have had access to a collection of social and economic benefits. Scholars have expanded on what constitutes social rights and the entitlements gleaned from inclusion within a citizenry. Their preoccupation with social policy arises from the assumption that nation-states are the key organizers and providers of social rights and citizenship; a claim often associated with the post-World War II discourse on human rights. Social citizenship literature suggests that individuals deserve economic stability and a sense of social well-being. Because these scholars have overwhelmingly focused on the development of social policy as a process of citizenship, our ideas regarding social citizenship have been limited to the political practices of states rather than the socio-economic needs of individuals and communities.<sup>1</sup>

Many scholars have argued that the relevance of social citizenship theories has declined in the neoliberal era, which has made interpretations of citizenship based on social policy expansion problematic.<sup>2</sup> Not only have some scholars documented the ways in which governments have failed to eliminate social inequality on a universal basis, other scholars have

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<sup>1</sup> Engin F. Isin, Danielle Juteau, and Davia Statsiulis, "Recasting the Social in Citizenship," in *Recasting the Social in Citizenship*, edited by Engin F. Isin (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2008), 10; Keith Faulks, *Citizenship in Modern Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> Isin, et. al, "Recasting the Social in Citizenship," 5; Faulks, *Citizenship in Modern Britain*, 68-69.

questioned the importance of social governance in the present period.<sup>3</sup> Neoliberal interpretations of citizenship require that citizens act as autonomous agents, and assume responsibility for their own social and economic needs. Scholars of neoliberalism have maintained that individuals have an obligation to demonstrate entrepreneurship to the state.<sup>4</sup> The shift in discourse toward extreme notions of individualism has led to the depreciation of state policies that have been meant to secure the social welfare of the citizen.<sup>5</sup> Scholars' inquiries into social citizenship have emphasized the neoliberal transformation, and many have dismissed understandings of citizenship that privilege 'the social'.<sup>6</sup>

How might we recognize the socio-economic inequality present within political institutions while forming a transformative notion of citizenship? While many scholars argue that 'the social' has become irrelevant in the theoretical fabric of citizenship and in the practice of government, others have attempted to 'recast the social in citizenship'. These scholars are primarily interested in the role of social organizing and cultural formations in the theoretical meaning of citizenship and within the practices of citizenship reflected in everyday life. Social citizenship from this perspective is defined as:

The art of being with others, negotiating different situations and identities, and articulating ourselves as distinct yet similar to others in our everyday lives, and asking questions of justice. Through these social struggles, we develop a sense of our rights as others' obligations and others' rights as our obligations. We may interpret or understand our domains of engagement separately from each other in our social lives, but occasionally someone or something reminds us that we are

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Mettler, "Social Citizenship of Separate Sovereignties: Governance in the New Deal Welfare State," in *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, edited by Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileaur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 233; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 65-66.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Faulks, *Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 200), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Faulks, *Citizenship in Modern Britain*, 68-69.



performing citizenship. It is in this deep and broader sense of enactment that citizenship is social.<sup>7</sup>

Social citizenship is, then, not purely an individual or state-centered project, but instead a deeper social project that is enacted within social movements and community actions. Because social struggles are often contextual, social citizenship is dependent on the time and the place of socio-political activity. Additionally, those engaged in citizenship may interact with the state as well as other political, social and economic institutions. Conceiving of citizenship as a formation of social meanings allows for a simultaneously rooted and fluid analysis of how citizenship is fulfilled or not fulfilled.

The expression and transformation of citizenship by participation in social movements can be understood through the theory of performativity and a group politics of becoming. Critical scholars have showcased that the citizen-subject is formed through hegemonic discourses and the practices of domination by the state. While the formation of subjectivity is largely representational as a discursive construct, the creation of the self is also enacted and embodied through the actions of the subject that affect the material. Citizenship is performed by the subject in relation to the rest of society. Understanding citizenship as a process of subject formation is transformative in that the subjects' performance of self can supersede dominant discourses in order to form new social and political meanings of citizenship. New subjectivities that connect with innovative performances of citizenship inform our social world, and affect how future formations of citizenship are embodied.

The transformation of subjectivity is not only an individual project; as citizens engage in social movements, they enact performances of citizenship while being-in-common. A politics of becoming then is crucial in the formation of citizenship. This project aims to demonstrate this

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<sup>7</sup> Isin, et. al, "Recasting the Social in Citizenship," 7.

process through an examination of labor organizing during the New Deal era. I discuss union organization in Chicago's meatpacking industry during the years of 1917-1940 in order to illustrate how social citizenship develops through a politics of becoming. The performance of citizenship by meatpacking workers provide an example of how workers and community members transformed their own subject positions by exercising individual and group agency through the union movement. Workers argued for group recognition around class and racial formations by engaging in citizenship activities that reflected their demands for socio-economic security. Overall, citizenship is a social process reliant on citizen-subject formations that are in constant interaction with the rest of society. While the state and other societal institutions have maintained socio-economic inequalities in a variety of forms that affect everyday people, an examination of group formations and the politics of becoming acted out within social movements helps to identify avenues for the elimination of socio-economic inequality while providing a transformative model of citizenship.

To develop this argument, I proceed as follows. Chapter one begins by reviewing the social citizenship literature, first focusing on the development of the liberal tradition of citizenship rights and how that tradition has shaped nation-state policies throughout Western democracies. I then address the ways in which nation-states have attempted to acknowledge issues of inequality through the implementation of social policies that culminated in the creation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century welfare state. The analysis of welfare state regimes is complicated by scholarly critiques of the liberal democratic notion of citizenship rights. For example, I examine critical analyses of U.S. citizenship that encourages us recognize that social relationships of power, and the unequal application of social programs during the New Deal, limited the procurement of social citizenship by the state. A complex set of subjectivities that include the

formation of race, gender and class meanings have affected peoples' articulations of citizenship in the U.S., and their overall material well-being. The recognition that the state has a role in the continuation of socio-economic inequality is a reminder that citizenship is a consequence of the exercise of state power over subjects, and a reflection of the hegemonic discourses related to citizenship and belonging. While the formation of the citizen-subject has been affected by the state and discursive constructs that favor social and political inequities, I highlight how the existence of social movements allow for a transformative model of citizenship that has been otherwise disregarded by dominant understandings of human rights.

I will discuss the importance of socio-political organizations by stressing historical movements for the recognition of cultural identity in combination with citizens' claims for the redistribution of resources. This will allow us to reassess the importance of the 'social' by drawing our attention to the lived experiences of people. Subjects and their subsequent interactions within communities help place citizenship within a process of 'becoming', or in other words, the creation of new group formations that are contingent on citizenship performances. The actions of those in solidarity with one another hold transformative potential, as communities demand recognition and the redistribution of resources through particular forms of organizing, or the performance of social citizenship.

Chapter two begins by analyzing the different social movements that took shape in the U.S. during the 1930s, providing a brief history of labor organizing during this period. I further detail the creation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and discuss the strategies that unionists and rank-and-file workers used within their work environments to argue for greater resources. I also note a few controversies within the union movement during the New Deal, including fractious union politics and the exclusion of certain social groups within labor

organizing drives. The point of this chapter is to build on the ontological critiques of social citizenship discussed in chapter one, and to propose an understanding of social citizenship that not only recognizes subjects' being in relation to the rest of society, but also how subjectivities are formed through a politics of becoming enacted within social movements.

The final chapter examines the Chicago meatpacking industry and the establishment of the PWOC. I begin with a summary of the meatpacking industry within Chicago, looking at how community relationships developed between workers within the industry and nearby neighborhoods. The role of social formations and group identities is elaborated on within this section in order to highlight the ways in which union organizing informed workers' sense of community cohesion, and to explore how that process eventually contributed to material changes in workers' lives. A discussion of specific workplace actions by meatpacking laborers follows. Bargaining contracts provided incremental support for workers' at an institutional level, while community organizations and direct actions through work-stoppages, slowdowns and strikes built solidarity amongst workers that further contributed to their social well-being as packers recognized unionists' economic and social claims. The chapter concludes that workers' stressed a politics of becoming through union activities that affected their material lives. The act of 'becoming' performed by meatpackers within the Chicago union movement connects to social citizenship by demonstrating that social processes are a key part of citizen-subject formations. Performances of citizenship aid in the reduction of inequality and produce new articulations of citizenship that assist us in further understanding arguments for socio-economic transformation.

## **Chapter One: U.S. Citizenship, the Social Realm, and a Politics of Becoming**

The many threads of social citizenship literature have roots in Enlightenment theory. Many citizenship theorists have attempted to grapple with questions of human worth and the divide between the public and private by stringing together the theoretical beliefs of individual natural rights and the collective participation of the political community. With the passage of social policies throughout industrial democracies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many scholars concluded that individual social rights are a defining part of human existence, and thus citizenship. While the U.S. government expanded social policy during the New Deal, scholars explored the ways in which citizenship rights have been a particular asset of certain communities rather than others. Scholars have underlined the ways in which citizenship understood through a predominantly liberal theoretical tradition has been unable to grapple with pertinent social questions, and thus the material consequences of the practice of citizenship had been left uninterrogated. The discursive focus on the construction of the welfare state is a by-product of intervention into the bounds of the citizen-subject formation. With that said, an interpretation of citizenship that grapples with these critiques and puts forward a renewed definition of rights and belonging is necessary. The following chapter will review the discussions described above in detail, and then discuss the ‘social’ aspects of citizenship with a particular focus on social movements and processes of group organizations’ becoming.

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### **Citizenship Rights and Social Governance**

Citizenship constitutes a complex set of liberal traditions rooted within a rights-based understanding of existence and republican notions of government that have influenced the ways in which social governance has been conceptualized and practiced. In the *Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke defined the role of governments as necessary for the protection of

man's property. Men are in a constant 'state of nature', and the creation of governments is meant to mediate any conflict between individuals, and to provide security where conflict erupts. According to Locke, if at any moment an individual's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness is tarnished, either by civil wrong-doing or violent behavior from another, the government should interfere to discipline those at fault. The government is meant to provide civil rights and protections to individuals in order to resolve the chaotic and unjust qualities of nature where reason does not prevail. Overall, Locke believed that individuals knew what was in their best interests, and that individuals made rational decisions as part of being. This universality was crucial for Locke, as the creation of government meant the application of laws relevant to every citizen, equally. Contract law, in conjunction with the legal protection of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, form the basis of civil rights.<sup>8</sup>

Rousseau's thesis on the 'social contract' came together with the natural rights. Rousseau suggested that the state is in friction with 'the sovereign', or the people that reside within a nation. He believed that for a healthy state to develop and thrive, citizens should be encouraged, if not required, to take part within 'public' affairs in order to deliberate about the current state of the nation, and to hold up the importance of the common good. Although Rousseau did not advocate for a system of representation, as he ultimately believed it would degrade citizen participation in public affairs, republicanism has been the central basis of citizenship rights in many Western states, including the U.S.<sup>9</sup> The sentiment in Locke's work suggested that people should be governed through a majority-rule system. Later, practices led to the creation of the

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<sup>8</sup> John Locke, "The Second Treatise of Government," in *John Locke Political Writings*, edited by David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 262-263.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Adelaide: The University of Adelaide eBooks, 2014), Book 1, Section 7 & 8.

electoral system and rule by political assembly. What has come to be known as political rights, Young explains, have largely been in contradiction with, civil rights. She continues, “Where liberal individualism regards the state as a necessary instrument to mediate conflict and regulate action so that individuals can have the freedom to pursue their private ends, the republican tradition locates freedom and autonomy in the actual public activities of citizenship.”<sup>10</sup> Stammers agrees that “because public power was only legitimate insofar as it served the private realm, the emphasis in natural rights was on the rights of private individuals against the state.”<sup>11</sup> In summary, the practice of public citizenship has been a complicated process in which political rights encompassed by the majority-vote and representational system have been at odds with the natural rights of the individual.

Civil and political rights have been the theoretical basis of concrete documents and institutional practices throughout Western democracies. Within the U.S., the Constitution and Bill of Rights have been based on this liberal theoretical tradition, and these documents have even referenced the “Right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” from Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*. In addition, different populations have used the concept of citizenship rights to argue for more equitable treatment from state authority, or to make claims for the elimination of the government bodies. For example, the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen,” written during the French Revolution, took seriously the irrefutable existence of natural rights, to be applied universally through law with respect to a just government body. Altogether, civil and political rights have been at the heart of citizenship scholarship, and have had real effects on the practice of government within the West.

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<sup>10</sup> Iris Marion Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Citizenship,” in *Theorizing Citizenship*, edited by Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 178.

<sup>11</sup> Neil Stammers, “Human Rights and Power,” *Political Studies* XLI, 70-82 (1993), 74.

The bounds of citizenship were heavily contested in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After two world wars and millions of lives lost, the application of 17<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment theory, represented by the citizenship traditions of natural rights and republicanism, seemed at odds with the existence of oppression by state authorities. State and world leaders came together in an effort to account for the crimes against humanity in the aftermath of World War II, and to develop a model for the recognition of all human lives throughout the globe. Thus was born the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), chartered through the United Nations and ratified by various countries across the world that pledged to respect certain aspects of human worth, and to help secure fundamental citizenship rights on an international basis. Many key aspects of civil and political rights were encompassed in the UDHR, and these have been seen as preconditions for the practice of just governments.

As well as advocating for civil and political rights, the UDHR also proposed the existence of ‘social rights’. Social rights, incorporated in Articles 22-29, are the rights to social security, community and individual social well-being. Within these articles, individuals by their very nature have rights within the ‘social’ realm of existence that ultimately must be protected by governments. Alongside this revelation, a collection of political theorists proposed varying explanations of how social rights came into existence, why social rights should be respected, and how social rights should be protected by government bodies.<sup>12</sup>

One explanation, presented by Marshall in *Social Class and Inequality*, suggests that social rights were provided by the English government with the institutionalization of the education system in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After significant working class and political organization, the English government began to provide civil rights in the 1700s, political rights in the 1800s,

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<sup>12</sup> “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *The United Nations*, accessed May 29, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>



and then social rights in the 1900s. Each introduction of democratic rights led to the institutionalization of new spheres of citizenship and state policies, with social rights being a key aspect of English citizenship. Marshall defined social citizenship as “The right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society.”<sup>13</sup> By way of his historical analysis, Marshall claimed that governments play a key role in fulfilling citizenship, and that the ‘social’ aspects of life were a distinct process that could be secured and protected through government actions. Therefore, law and policy could be developed, and programs instituted, to achieve social security and the well-being of communities and individuals alike.

In recent decades, social welfare programs and the political leadership and movements that advocated for them, have come under considerable scrutiny in scholarship circles concerned with citizenship. The constraint on social policies within the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has coincided with the growth of literature concerned with the social obligation of individuals to the state.<sup>14</sup> Literature concerned with neoliberal citizenship has emphasized “entrepreneurship, sufficiency, autonomy, and individualism” as the cornerstone of rights.<sup>15</sup> Neoliberalism as an ideology and set of conventions has in many cases redefined the extent to which social rights have been viewed as a valuable political and theoretical concept in Western democracies. This has led some scholars to question whether social citizenship exists at all. Others have noted that the development of neoliberalism has led to the transformation of social well-being from a state-centered process to “the responsibility of the autonomous agent, the neoliberal subject (citizen or

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<sup>13</sup> T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 72.

<sup>14</sup> Faulk, *Citizenship in Modern Britain*, 77-97; Isin, et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 5.

<sup>15</sup> Isin, et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 5.

non-citizen).”<sup>16</sup> Although the shift in scholarship norms has been significant, changes in social policies within Western democracies to more individual-centered programs have been diverse in practice, and these changes have happened at different points in time.<sup>17</sup> With the spread of neoliberalism, some scholars have concluded that liberal governments as a whole no longer practice state affairs from a ‘social perspective’.<sup>18</sup>

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### U.S. Citizenship and the Exercise of State Power over ‘the Social’

A major part of Marshall’s thesis focused on the reduction of poverty through the use of social programs established by the state. He believed that even if civil and political rights existed within a given country, poverty would limit an individual’s ability to fully exercise citizenship rights. As referenced earlier, social programs became a point of significant focus for many social scientists in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The welfare state came to be defined by a certain number of parameters including the existence of policies such as old-age insurance, welfare and cash benefits, food supplement programs, unemployment benefits, job integration programs, labor protections, and state child-care programs. Many scholars have emphatically debated what constitutes a welfare state, and the merit of specific welfare state regimes.

U.S. social policies have been significantly different in comparison to the European context, leading many scholars to observe that the U.S. is not a welfare state model despite significant restructuring of government policy during the New Deal to include many social programs. In contrast, others have suggested that the U.S., through historical circumstances and

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<sup>16</sup> Nikolas Rose, “The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government,” *Economy and Society* 25 No. 3 (1996): 340.

<sup>17</sup> Isin et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 5.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies,” in *Foucault and Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, edited by Andrew Barry, Thomas Osbourne, and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 40.

particular ideological commitments, did create a welfare state but with far different implications compared to European counterparts. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Congress created a political and social apparatus during the New Deal that favored particular parts of the American population and represented various ideological and social commitments that would affect the participation of individuals in public affairs.

One critique of New Deal social policy suggests that people of color and women were by and large excluded from socio-economic benefits. The policy provisions within the Social Security Act (SSA) and various laws related to labor standards either formally or in practice excluded particular social categories in compliance with various political interests, such as the Southern Democrats.<sup>19</sup> For example, social benefits tied to the SSA's Aid to Dependent Children provision mandated that social relief be administered by local officials rather than federal officials. The distribution of resources through local relief offices maintained social disparities, and prevented aid from getting into the hands of many people of color, particularly in the South.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, social security and unemployment insurance lacked universal coverage as many women and people of color were not able to secure constant and stable employment, and many also suffered from job discrimination, making it difficult if not impossible to accrue benefits.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, 65 percent of blacks across the U.S. had no access to SSA benefits because of their position in domestic or agricultural labor.<sup>22</sup> Mettler argues that the disparity in relief and

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<sup>19</sup> Ira Katznelson, "Welfare in Black and White," in *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 38.

<sup>20</sup> Katznelson, "Welfare in Black and White," 38, 40 and 41.

<sup>21</sup> Katznelson, "Welfare in Black and White," 43 and 47.

<sup>22</sup> Katznelson, "Welfare in Black and White," 43.

social benefits had the effect of making a two-tier system of citizenship which benefited white, male workers. As she explains:

Divided citizenship emerged, with white men incorporated within the uniform domain of national government, and women and nonwhite men left under the auspices of the states subject to highly variable formations of citizenship. These two levels of government ruled like separate sovereignties, largely because of the distinct institutional and administrative character of each realm, but also because such differences in turn permitted the application of disparate ideological norms in the definition of citizenship.<sup>23</sup>

Policy disparities and institutional arrangements have led many scholars to recognize that social citizenship largely a white working class male phenomenon, as working status has intimately connected people to their social insurance benefits.<sup>24</sup> As Nakano Glenn explains, U.S. social citizenship gained legitimacy only through the practice of ‘work’, as people deemed free laborers were able to take part in liberal citizenship that led to substantive rights for individuals. She states that “the two [categories] were brought together in the widely held ideal of the ‘worker citizen,’” a category of citizenship not only akin to masculinity, but also whiteness.<sup>25</sup> Overall, Mettler concludes that, “the New Deal enhanced American social citizenship inasmuch as policymakers *began* to design regulatory labor policies and redistributive social policies, both of which reached citizens more broadly and made rights and obligations more standardized,” but alongside the continued existence of feudal-like conditions for some.<sup>26</sup>

Granting state regulatory power over particular programs thus maintained social hierarchies within the U.S., and excluded those of color, women and others from benefits

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Mettler, “Social Citizens of Separate Sovereignties,” 233.

<sup>24</sup> Katznelson, “Welfare in Black and White,” 36; Mettler, “Social Citizens of Separate Sovereignties,” 233; Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 85.

<sup>25</sup> Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Mettler, “Social Citizens of Separate Sovereignties,” 233. (original emphasis)

depending on specific geographical location, prevailing cultural practices, and the historical context.<sup>27</sup> This observation draws attention to several contradictions and longstanding issues within the category of ‘citizenship’. For instance, feminist scholars have critiqued the very notion of citizenship as a phallogentric phenomenon, drawing attention to how liberal theorists and generations of state leaders have not given significant attention to women’s ideological viewpoints and material concerns.<sup>28</sup> As Young explains, “commentators have argued that in extolling the virtues of citizenship as participation in a universal public realm, modern men expressed a flight from sexual difference, from having to recognize another kind of existence that they could not entirely understand, and from the embodiment, dependency on nature, and morality that women represent.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the theoretical foundation of citizenship rights has privileged men’s position within the public as well as the private realm, and has affected women’s ability to economically prosper as systemic practices within the political realm have been exclusionary. Recognizing the underlying assumptions of citizenship theorists, scholars such as Nakano Glenn elaborate on the ways in which specific women have been able to enter the public sphere or participate within state institutions at quicker rates than others. Overall, these scholars’ analyses encourage us to consider the power relationships in socio-political practices including the ways in which those power relationships are institutionalized and affect the practice of citizenship.

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<sup>27</sup> Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Citizenship,” 179. For more information, refer to Nancy Hartstock, *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983), chapters 7 & 8.

Other scholars have observed that citizenship within the U.S. has been a racialized project. Since the existence of chattel slavery, the state has played a key role in influencing and cultivating hegemonic narratives and cultural beliefs that have constituted specific racialized meanings. Omi and Winant explain that the state has attempted to balance the racial order as it is constituted at different historical moments:

[Racial order is] encoded in law, organized through policy-making, and enforced by a repressive apparatus. But the equilibrium thus achieved is unstable, for the great variety of conflicting interests encapsulated in racial meanings and identities can be no more than pacified – at best – by the state. Racial conflict persists at every level of [U.S.] society, varying over time and in respect to different groups, but ubiquitous. Indeed, the state is itself [further] penetrated and structured by the very interests whose conflict it seeks to stabilize and control.<sup>30</sup>

The U.S. government and related institutions have affected racial constructs and maintained discrimination against those of color. Racialized meanings in social and political practices have made citizenship itself a racial political project.

Overall, the concept of citizenship has tended to homogenize the concerns of particular social groups, as the liberal theoretical foundation of citizenship has required the universal application of rights and thus the exclusion of social and political concerns of non-white peoples and women. Of course, the exclusionary processes of citizenship have also affected social identities outside of race and gender constructs. Whether the person is a queer minority or a political refugee, universal and individualistic interpretations of citizenship have failed to account for the exploitation of certain communities. Discrimination in social and political practices carried out by the state has led many scholars to question the primacy of law and policy initiatives as the basis of social citizenship. The belief in the universal application of laws has

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 84-85.

undermined the particular needs of specific social groups.<sup>31</sup> To connect to earlier analyses then, the welfare state as an ideal theoretical model for social citizenship has been antithetical to social equity, as discrimination and exclusion have persisted and at times been exacerbated. As Faulks concludes, the underlying assumptions within the theory of citizenship showcase that “liberal theorists have failed to develop an inclusive and rounded concept of citizenship because of their abstract and exclusive assumptions.”<sup>32</sup>

Stammers continues this analysis by drawing attention to the way in which human rights, as a discipline and governing model, has either ignored or underdeveloped strategies to deal with social contexts that mitigate human rights guarantees such as full and complete access to economic resources. He explains that there is “a continual interaction between the individual and rest of society (the subject and the object) but instead of being dissolved within this interaction, the autonomous subject is perpetually re-constituted through social practice.”<sup>33</sup> Put differently, human rights and citizenship theorists have often neglected that citizenship is a socially rooted project; a phenomenon in which the citizen-subject is rooted in social processes.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, human rights scholars have decontextualized the phenomenon of citizenship, and ignored the fact that not all citizens have had access to the economic resources necessary to take part in society. The specific set of social and economic practices that lead to inequality and unequal citizenship are overlooked in a large section of citizenship literature that touches on the social. Stammers illuminates that “Liberal theory holds that there should be a equality between

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<sup>31</sup> Young, “Polity and Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” 175-176; Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Faulks, *Citizenship in Modern Britain*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Stammers, “Human Rights and Power,” 73.

<sup>34</sup> Stammers, “Human Rights and Power,” 72-73.

individuals in the public realm but a systemic view of power makes it clear that formal (abstract) equality is no guarantee of that.”<sup>35</sup> So whereas rights-based theories are often disembodied and abstract, the citizen-subject is affected by inequality in embodied and material ways. Nakano Glenn further extends this analysis when she observes that it is “Often face-to-face practices [that] determine whether people have or don’t have substantive as opposed to purely formal rights of citizens.”<sup>36</sup> Consequently, scholars of differentiated citizenship have rightfully observed the ways in which economic discrimination in the U.S. has been practiced, as opposed to liberal theorists who have largely been uncritical of social relationships and the power embedded within them that have aided in socio-economic inequality.<sup>37</sup> With the designation of citizenship as a socially constructed process, we can recognize the complexity of the relationships that manifest within social and citizenship formations. Therefore, the different and varying ways that citizenship rights have been restricted or fulfilled in any context is of fundamental importance.

The discourse on social citizenship is overwhelmingly focused on the welfare state, despite significant concerns about the effectiveness of social policy. As Brodie explains, citizenship theorists have favored “particular ways of seeing, and privilege[d] specific vocabularies, styles of truth-telling, and truth tellers. In so doing, they [have] help[ed] shape particular ways of seeing subject positions, not the least the citizen subject of liberal democracy.”<sup>38</sup> The focus on social and economic policies within states has evaded the concerns of particular social groups, with drastic consequences for the process of citizen-subject

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<sup>35</sup> Stammers, “Human Rights and Power,” 80.

<sup>36</sup> Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Faulks, *Citizenship in Modern Britain*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Janine Brodie, “The Social in Social Citizenship,” in *Recasting the Social in Citizenship*, edited by Engin F. Isin (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), 23.



formations including making it difficult for many people to have access to economic resources. How can we recognize the discriminatory practices of the state and unequal forms of citizenship, while also seeing the transformative possibilities of citizenship theories within social practice? To attempt to answer this question, a further look into the processes of citizen-subject formations is necessary.

We must first recognize that social citizenship scholarship has been used to influence ideas about the particular role of citizen populations within larger political processes of the state, with a specific focus on how the state has used liberal theory as a way to influence people's subject formations. The state has taken an active role to develop discursive assumptions about citizenship, and has favored liberal interpretations of citizenship practices. Rose argues:

Nineteenth-century liberalism, if it is considered as a *rationality of rule* and not simply as a set of philosophical and normative reflections *upon* rule, produced a series of problems about the governability of individuals, families, markets and populations. These arose out of the insistence upon the necessary limits of political authority, notably in relation to economic and industrial life, public freedoms of debate and the expression of thought, religious practice, and familial authority.<sup>39</sup>

That is to say, the regulatory power of government to interpret liberalism, in this case through the designation of the bounds of social participation and of policy programs, has come to describe the ways in which the citizen-subject are formed.

As states developed through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the liberal tradition of citizenship and natural rights was popularized simultaneously with government efforts focused on the production and dissemination of certain knowledges on how to cure social ills such as inequality and poverty. This practice has been contradictory; liberal rights of citizenship and the knowledges that advocate for them are counter to the economic intervention and the political aims of the state. Rose continues by explaining that:

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<sup>39</sup> Rose, "Governing "Advanced" Liberal Democracy," 39. (original emphasis)

Expertise - authority arising out of a claim to knowledge, to neutrality and to efficacy - came to provide a number of solutions to this apparent opposition between the need to govern in the interests of morality and order, and the need to restrict government in the interests of liberty and economy. Liberal rule was thus rendered operable, not merely by the politico-philosophical pronouncement of the sanctity of the opposition of public and private, politics and markets, state and civil society, but through the capacity of various knowledgeable persons to render this formula operable... by the truths produced and disseminated by the positive sciences...<sup>40</sup>

The creation of knowledges that influence citizen populations and the government's intent to rule and produce order had led to particular citizen-subject formations, with the interjection of the state into practices of the 'social'.<sup>41</sup> Brodie concludes that "The task of liberal government, then, was to construct and enforce a particular model of societal and institutional pluralism and, at the same time, develop reflexive strategies of intervention [into the social] to sustain this model." Social policy, and the development of social citizenship discourses, reflects the ensuing and contradictory processes of government and disciplinary intervention into community and cultural formations.<sup>42</sup> One could even view discourses of Americanism, and thus arguments for civil equality without substantive measures for material stability, as a form of this intervention.<sup>43</sup> In all, the creation of the liberal citizen-subject in the imaginary of the polity has been frequently used to produce knowledge of, and subsequently control over, minority groups and the social and political movements that have sustained them.

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<sup>40</sup> Rose, "Governing "Advanced" Liberal Democracy," 39.

<sup>41</sup> Brodie, "The Social in Social Citizenship," 28.

<sup>42</sup> Brodie, "The Social in Social Citizenship," 29.

<sup>43</sup> Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 51. Rhetorical expressions of rights by citizens, such as the appeal to 'Americanism' or equality under the law, have also helped to embrace the natural rights understanding of citizenship as 'rights' have been articulated throughout U.S. history. Although this has aided in community and social movement organizing in some capacities, other group formations have suffered despite appeals to American values and ideological perspectives. For a more detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 6, 35-39.

According to Brodie, one of the first authors who recognized the interjection of the state into social matters and citizenship-subject formations was Polanyi in *The Great Transformation*. Polanyi highlights the complex interaction between the state apparatus, the development of market economies, and particular group formations that have prompted and encouraged government action in favor of the larger population. As nations moved from a largely feudal to market organized society, European social structures changed significantly, leading to social upheaval and disorganization in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. That is to say, the stress put on the populations of Europe ultimately caused by this change created several previously unrecognized social problems as society itself began to be formulated through government intervention.<sup>44</sup>

One problem in particular was that of social poverty. In feudal institutions and practices, people were connected to the land, with certain responsibilities and allegiances to a lord that provided for their well-being in a tentative fashion. This paternalistic system was deconstructed with the enclosure of lands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The forced removal of paupers from feudal communities created a landless, starving proletariat that roamed in search of wage labor. Polanyi argued that at certain points in history, the social degradation caused by this process (i.e. market orthodoxy) and subsequent capital accumulation had been both mitigated and sustained through the use of social policy prompted by peoples' movements in opposition to enclosure and starvation. Interest groups and associations, formed around social and political goals, advocated for government intervention to incite social stability and to protect the landless waged laborers from poverty and starvation.<sup>45</sup> As governments have encouraged the growth of capitalist

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<sup>44</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Social Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 108.

<sup>45</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 141.

enterprises, communities have responded within a varying degree of objection and activism.<sup>46</sup> This has caused government policy to change to varying degrees throughout history. Polanyi elaborates that the state's "solutions [to citizens' responses to market orthodoxy] switched over from individualistic to 'collectivistic,' from liberal to antiliberal, from 'laissez-fair' to interventionist," with the outcome being a diverse set of state policies that favored a social perspective.<sup>47</sup>

Polanyi envisions a purpose for social policy by government that lies outside of the common discourse concerning citizenship rights. As Brodie notes, "Polanyi links the cultural and discursive designation of the very ideas of society and societal protection, as objects of governance, to the formation of liberal political economies."<sup>48</sup> The support and protection of capitalist economies has been a particular performance of government. The state then has actively constructed the 'social' in order to maintain the liberal citizen-subject narrative, which has affected the material conditions of citizens. In other words, at particular points of history government entities have benefited from the creation of social policy, or the fulfillment of social citizenship, in order to shape their citizens' perspectives relative to the state and market economy.

Human rights discourses based within the liberal tradition were a radical disconnect from earlier ideas of human worth. As mentioned before, social movements have used the language of natural rights to initially argue for equitable conditions and treatment by governments. But Stammers suggests that liberal theories today have lost their radical potential and that currently, "The doctrine of natural rights [has] ceased to be a revolutionary challenge. Instead it came to

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<sup>46</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 159.

<sup>47</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 159.

<sup>48</sup> Brodie, "The Social in Social Citizenship," 30.

sustain the highly unequal economic power relations inherent in developing capitalist societies.”<sup>49</sup> Young agrees that “those social activities that most determine the status of individuals and groups are anarchic and oligarchic; economic life is not sufficiently under the control of [most] citizens [in order for them] to affect the unequal status and treatment” they receive.<sup>50</sup> These authors draw attention to the dubious distinction between the public and private realms of citizenship and the formation of social identities. The existence of the private realm has altogether allowed individuals and political leadership to continue to acquire wealth and power at the expense of the common citizenry or ‘social’ collective. Hegemonic discourses that affect the formation of the citizen-subject have thus continued to favor the natural rights of the individual as the key form of which citizenship takes place, ultimately leaving many economic and social constructs uninterrogated.

In this section, I have established that social citizenship in the U.S. has largely been an unequal social and political project. The state along with public and academic discourses, have proclaimed that individualism and natural rights are the cornerstones of citizenship, while inequality and social exploitation in a variety of forms have largely persisted. In all, the persistence of inequality has called into question the legitimacy of claims for social governance, which has led many scholars to question the viability of social citizenship theories.

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<sup>49</sup> Stammers, “Human Rights and Power,” 74.

<sup>50</sup> Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Citizenship,” 176.

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### Citizenship, Social Movements, and a Politics of Becoming

If the practices of the state and economic enterprise have influenced the discourse on social citizenship, and maintained socio-economic inequality, how might we imagine a transformative notion of citizenship? We can see that citizenship and the claims made for social rights by communities are indeed indicative of an important phenomenon.<sup>51</sup> The environments that we inhabit help to inform our sense of self, and the way in which we involve ourselves in practices of citizenship further reflect the norms present within our social world. As Butler notes, the development of subjectivity does not only mean the state “unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also [subjection involves what] *activates* or forms the subject.”<sup>52</sup> The process of activation includes the performance of self or identity by which the subject exhibits a sense of ‘being’. The activation of self includes those performances of citizenship. Although influenced by the state and prevailing discourses, subject formation is transformative in that the self is not static but rather changes as identity is further informed by discursive practices and the experience of embodiment. The act of ‘becoming’ provides a moment at which the subject can display agency within their social environment, and thus embody a new self. Gibson-Graham explain that, “Exactly how subjects ‘become,’ and more specifically how they may shift and create new identities for themselves,” are points that we can observe within community organization.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Stammers, “Human Rights and Power,” 73; Isin et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 5.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 84; Quoted in J.J. Gibson-Graham, “Reluctant Subjects: Subjection and Becoming,” in *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 23-24.

<sup>53</sup> Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, 24.

Because citizenship is performed through the embodiment of self, the actions citizens take within their communities become especially relevant. The social and political institutions we partake in affect our everyday lives, and influence our subjectivities which are then articulated through the continued actions we take in our social lives. Therefore, the changes in subjectivity, or the act of becoming, does not only take place within the individual subject; the political and social institutions subjects inhabit aid in the process of becoming, as group formations inform the construction of the citizen-subject.<sup>54</sup> In a collective, people intervene in unequal or oppressive social processes, and at that juncture a “micropolitics of cultivating receptivity might be activated and a politics of becoming embarked on to produce potentially lasting effects” on the social and political terrain.<sup>55</sup> Butler further notes that the politics of becoming is not a linear process, as the activation of individuals-in-common is continuous, and never quite complete; neither citizenship nor other aspects of social identity are essential markers of being.<sup>56</sup> While the process of embodiment allows us to gather certain meanings within the performance of subjectivity, those meanings change over time by the individual and particular groups within a given context. The performativity of citizenship holds a potential state of pause in which those in common activity can change how citizenship is viewed within their social context, and that transformation can lead to changes in how the subject experiences their material world.

Isin et. al. attempt to recognize the complexity of the social and political life of subjects by arguing that social movements articulate the formation of group identity, as well as promoting

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<sup>54</sup> Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, 23; William E. Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 146.

<sup>55</sup> Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, 24; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, chapter 4.

the redistribution of resources.<sup>57</sup> The articulation of rights by communities is a sign of citizenship participation as different communities take steps to change their social and material world through the further performance of citizenship.<sup>58</sup> In other words, social movements and those active within them, “do not imagine themselves as struggling for the maintenance or expansion of social, cultural, or sexual citizenship rights. Instead, they invest in whatever issues seem most related and closest to their social lives, and dedicate their time and energy accordingly.”<sup>59</sup> The claim that citizenship is reflected in the organization of cultural groups indicates that ‘those on the margins’ hold a crucial role in the identification of citizenship formations. Isin et. al conclude that:

Such social identities as religious, environmental, sexual, ethnic, and national have been hypostasized, essentialized, and immortalized to appear as though social struggles over citizenship are either about redistribution or recognition as fixed struggles or that these social identities undercut and inhibit an ostensibly universal identity of citizenship....these are false choices.<sup>60</sup>

In my view, the politics of becoming represented within social movements allow us to recognize the inequality present within processes of citizenship, while also seeing the actions that individuals and groups take to reconstitute citizenship in order to affect their material surroundings, and call for socio-economic justice. While citizenship is practiced through embodied forms of being, often in common, those performances change based on the historical context. The voice of groups and individuals points to how the citizen-subject formation is

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<sup>57</sup> Isin, et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship, 5. (original emphasis)

<sup>58</sup> Isin, et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 6.

<sup>59</sup> Isin, et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 7.

<sup>60</sup> Isin et. al, “Recasting the Social in Citizenship,” 19.



performed, as well as how citizenship is refashioned during the process of movement building.<sup>61</sup> The focus on the voice of subjects also points to the contextual process that is citizenship; the citizen-subject formation differs across space and time. The importance of these specific insights will be evident when we turn to applying this larger theoretical framework concerning social citizenship and the politics of becoming to unionization in the Chicago meatpacking industry. What emerges is an understanding of how social mobilization from below is a practice of citizenship, and that social movement organizing can also help to redistribute resources and provide for the material well-being of groups.

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<sup>61</sup> Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, 25; Pat O'Malley, Lorna Weir, and Clifford Shearing, "Governmentality, Criticism, Politics." *Economy and Society* 26, no. 4 (1997), 503.

## **Chapter Two: New Deal Labor Organizing, Movements, and a Politics of Becoming**

The interdisciplinary quality of New Deal scholarship has provided an array of explanations for the changes that took place in American political and civic life during the 1930s and 1940s. Some scholars stress the importance of political changes at the national level. For some, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his presidential leadership helped form ideological changes within the American political system. Other scholars have accentuated the expansion of various social and political agencies within government that contributed to changes in the social and economic fabric in the U.S. Substantial social and cultural changes also took place due to grassroots social and labor organizations. This organizing, manifesting in particular localities and through various labor bodies, contributed to an overall shift in American politics, and affected the day-to-day experiences of people. Community organizations articulated claims to economic resources, and participants in social movements envisioned new subjectivities within unions and other organizations. Activists and community members drew on constructions of being as people of color, as women, and as workers, transformed their social relationships through unlikely alliances and a politics of becoming.

In this chapter, I discuss New Deal social movements which combine class formations with other social identity formations to bring to the forefront the ways in which social relationships are transformed by communities, and how active participation in the reconstruction of workplaces and how acts of political solidarity changed ideas of citizenship in the U.S. This chapter touches on the New Deal labor movement in its entirety, including worker organizations that affected the development of social policy. This overview sets the stage for the following chapter, where I focus on a case study of localized union organizing within the Chicago meatpacking industry. While labor law and social policy had significant effects on the

development of social insurance, I argue that social movements not only influenced the passage of social policy but also fulfilled the conditions of social citizenship in particular localities.

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### U.S. Citizenship and New Deal Labor Organizing

The Great Depression had important social and economic effects on those in the United States. As Bernstein notes, “The great population movement of the thirties was transiency –the worker adrift in a sea of unemployment.”<sup>62</sup> Bernstein’s description reflects the fact that one-fourth of the laboring population in 1933 had no means of formal employment.<sup>63</sup> People lost their homes, struggled to maintain a consistent food source, and relief rolls at the state and local level swelled as demand exceeded municipalities’ ability to provide resources. Unemployed individuals and families traveled throughout the U.S. in search of stable work and board. In many areas, shanty towns were constructed to house the depressed and unemployed who had problems meeting basic subsistence needs. People of color and women felt the effects of the Great Depression more severely as economic conditions threatened families, communities, stable jobs, living wages and overall social security.<sup>64</sup>

Those in the federal government responded to the crisis with a variety of policy strategies. Significant administrative and policy changes took place as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office in 1933. The federal government began to take an active role in economic and social policy with the passage of many laws, and the expansion of administrative bodies. Notably, President Roosevelt advocated for an extended version of human rights within America

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<sup>62</sup> Irving Bernstein, “Americans in Depression and War,” in *A History of the American Worker*, edited by Richard B. Morris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 152.

<sup>63</sup> Bernstein, “Americans in Depression and War,” 152.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America since 1865* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2007), 107.

which broke from previous ideologies of the Gilded and Progressive era. In speeches and policy deliberations, FDR discussed the notion of the ‘Four Freedoms’ which built on American civil values such as the freedom of speech and religion, and he further advocated for the freedom from want and fear.<sup>65</sup> The first major legislative acts during FDR’s presidency addressed the financial industries and the overwhelmed local and state relief systems. Other programs at the beginning of the New Deal, such as the Public Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, employed segments of the population through government-run work camps and public works projects.<sup>66</sup>

The question of long-term relief or re-employment had been a more difficult issue to address for the federal government. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) authorized the federal government to manage industrial and labor relations to promote economic recovery from the Great Depression. Since many businesses gathered in associations by industry, the NIRA legalized the ability for laborers to do the same. Workers’ ability to collectively bargain was legalized in Sec. 7 (a) of the NIRA. Despite the public’s support for unionization, businesses fought the measure by breaking strikes and pursuing judicial action.<sup>67</sup>

The passage of the NIRA correlated with a noticeable amount of strikes and direct action activities in local communities. Although the labor movement had been on the decline prior to the Great Depression, millions of workers took part in work stoppages or strikes throughout the thirties. For instance, the United Mine Workers (UMW) coordinated a series of strikes during

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<sup>65</sup> Sidney Milkis, “Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Economic Constitutional Order, and the New Politics of Presidential Leadership,” in *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, edited by Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileaur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>66</sup> Bernstein, “Americans in Depression and War,” 154.

<sup>67</sup> Bernstein, “Americans in Depression and War,” 155-156, 162.

1933, and 50,000 Amalgamated Clothing Workers walked out of the job in the same year. Notable organizing drives took place in 1934, with the Teamsters organizing in Minneapolis, the unionization of dockworkers on the West Coast, and labor activism within Toledo's Auto-Lite company.<sup>68</sup> Employers often responded to these strikes with contempt, and several businesses an active role in discouraging such organizing through court injunctions, the creation of company unions,<sup>69</sup> and in black-listing particular employees that advocated for a union agenda. In some cases, tensions rose to the point of violence. FDR attempted to diffuse conflict by establishing particular federal labor boards for each industry in order to settle labor disputes through secret-ballot elections in the workplace. Despite the President's intent, labor strikes rose significantly, with 1,856 work stoppages taking place in 1934 alone.<sup>70</sup>

Labor unrest in mass production had been noted by several long-time union organizers in the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL historically serviced craft unions or specialized industries, and often neglected organizing in unskilled manufacturing.<sup>71</sup> Union leaders such as John L. Lewis, Charles P. Howard, and John Brophy saw the potential in organizing mass production industries, given heightened labor militancy. After some strife with other delegates in the AFL, industrial union advocates created the Committee for Industrial Organizations meant to expand industrial union organizing at the federation level.<sup>72</sup> The Committee for Industrial Organizations and the AFL organized cooperatively for some time in

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<sup>68</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 156-160.

<sup>69</sup> For a definition and detailed examination of company unions, refer to Irving Bernstein. *The Lean Years*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960, or Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984.

<sup>70</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 159.

<sup>71</sup> Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>72</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 163.

an attempt to avoid ‘dual unionism’, and to bring in as many workers under the union banner as possible.<sup>73</sup> After key union victories for the Committee for Industrial Organizations in steel, mining, and auto, the committee broke off from the AFL in 1938 to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a separate federation that would grant union charters to industrial locals. The AFL also had some limited success in organizing in the unskilled industries.<sup>74</sup> Overall, union membership increased significantly throughout the 1930s. In 1932, there were 2,689,000 workers in unions; by 1935, 3,584,000 workers were organized.<sup>75</sup> By 1939, more than 8 million American workers were unionized, with a large proportion of those unions affiliated with either the AFL or CIO.<sup>76</sup>

The state addressed labor unrest through policy changes, and in 1935 FDR switched strategies after his mediation system failed. The federal government passed the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to replace the contested NIRA. The NLRA, sponsored by Senator Robert Wagner, once again legalized collective bargaining, and further established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to oversee disputes between workers and owners. The passage of the NLRA legitimized workers’ ability to unionize, and would later be upheld by the Supreme Court in 1937. The NLRB helped to restrict managements’ abilities to interfere in union organizing by supporting workers’ self-organization, outlawing employers’ interference in secret-ballot elections, banning the discrimination pro-union employees, and delegitimizing company unions. The law attempted to balance the different power interests between capitalists, workers and the

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<sup>73</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 163.

<sup>74</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 17.

<sup>75</sup> Goldfield, *The Decline of Labor in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1987), 10.

<sup>76</sup> Bernstein, “Americans in Depression and War,” 168.

government. Despite these provisions, many businesses knowingly defied the policy, and rejected NLRB directives, prompting significant social and labor upheaval to continue.<sup>77</sup>

Much of the American public also advocated for long-term solutions to poverty and economic uncertainty. Roosevelt and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins commissioned the Committee on Economic Security (CES) in order to gain a greater perspective on social security needs in the U.S. In August of 1935, a revised report from the CES was passed by both houses of Congress which authorized unemployment insurance for workers and created an old-age relief system. In connection with the NLRA, the SSA would be the basis for common understandings of American social citizenship.<sup>78</sup> Many citizens thereby gained formal access to material resources that had been restricted prior to the New Deal.

The NLRA and the passage of social insurance were at least in part a response to the labor and social movements of the 1930s. Legitimately concerned about the implications of social unrest and the call for general strikes in 1934 and 1937, political and economic leaders responded by legitimizing the plight of the American public, and subsequently passing policy to provide short and long term economic relief. This is especially clear given the fact that unemployment did not significantly drop during the 1930s, with some 10.6 million still out of work during 1935.<sup>79</sup>

Poor living standards coupled with decreased benefits in many industries led to an increase in labor organizing in the latter half of the 1930s and early 1940s. The UAW coordinated strikes throughout the automobile industry, beginning with GM. Union advocates

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<sup>77</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 161-163.

<sup>78</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 168, 169.

<sup>79</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 172.

organized work stoppages in auto and utilized the sit-down strike in Akron, and later Flint. GM would sign a collective bargaining contract with the United Auto Workers-CIO in February of 1937, largely due to disruptive organizing strategies.<sup>80</sup> Other parts of the industry, including Chrysler, auto-parts dealers, tire makers and Ford would later sign contracts with the UAW.<sup>81</sup> Other workers throughout mass production industries were seeking contracts as well. Women workers in the retail industry went on strike by occupying a Woolworths Five and Dime store in Detroit in 1937, gaining a contract after a week of in-store protest.<sup>82</sup> In February of 1937, after some negotiation, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) of the CIO signed a bargaining agreement with U.S. Steel which eventually led to the unionization of a range of 'Big Steel' companies. Unionization in rubber production, "textile mills, car barns, wharves, appliances factories, and other work sites" continued into the 1940s.<sup>83</sup> Union density increased significantly in the war years, along with strike actions which happened in waves. By 1947, there were 14.8 million people in unions represented by the U.S.<sup>84</sup>

The use of direct action in the union and labor movements had the effect of developing solidarity amongst workers. Civil disobedience had been at the foundation of many New Deal social movements. The use of strikes, picket-lines, sit-down strikes and work stoppages at the point of production had the effect of placing power within laborers' hands by coordinated group efforts. In some cases, these strikes led to violent interactions between workers, employers, and

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<sup>80</sup> Bernstein, "Americans in Depression and War," 166; Zieger, *The CIO*, 50.

<sup>81</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 122.

<sup>82</sup> Dana Frank, "Girl Strikers Occupy Chain Store, Win Big: The Detroit Woolworth's Strike of 1937," in *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor's Last Century*, edited by Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D.G. Kelley. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 110-112.

<sup>83</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 76.

<sup>84</sup> Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States*, 10.



even the state. For example, Ford relied heavily on the repression of unionists, and often confronted union organizers with violence through a special company taskforce.<sup>85</sup> Burns elaborates, “In basic industries during the 1930s, the backbone of resistance to industrial unionism was broken by the heroic actions of trade unionists resisting employers, courts and even the government.”<sup>86</sup> Even further, industry and cross-industry sympathy or general strikes and boycotts crippled production across the geographical areas of San Francisco and Minneapolis in 1934.<sup>87</sup> The threat of general strike continued into the late 1930s and 1940s. Overall, workplace solidarity was at the heart of the union and labor movements as workers and broader communities demanded the redistribution of resources as well as dignity.<sup>88</sup>

There are several more factors that can contribute to our understanding of the labor movement. First, the movement for economic resources and social reforms stretched farther than the union movement. As Golfield notes, “Well before the labor upsurge at the workplace became widespread, militant working class movements of the unemployed and African-Americans were mobilized in large numbers.”<sup>89</sup> In addition, a range of organizations added to the working class coalition; activism by students and intellectuals, labor political parties, and Communist Party (CP) organizations all contributed to the movement. Even more broadly, Huey Long’s Share the Wealth campaign, Upton Sinclair’s movement for the eradication of poverty, and the Townsend

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<sup>85</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 47; Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> Joe Burns, *Reviving the Strike: How Working People can Regain Power and Transform America*. (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2011), 44.

<sup>87</sup> Bernstein, “Americans in Depression and War,” 160; Burns, *Reviving the Strike*, 37, 45; Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2004), 33-35.

<sup>88</sup> Burns, *Reviving the Strike*, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Goldfield, “Worker Insurgency: Radical Organization, and New Deal Labor Policy,” *American Political Science Review* 83, no. 1 (1989): 1269-1270.

movement added to a range of socio-economic actions during the New Deal. As the union movement grew, so did labor organizations on a large scale that provided breadth to social and political change. Goldfield argues that to ignore union growth “outside of the environment that nourished it is to fail to grasp the phenomenon fully.”<sup>90</sup>

Groups within the labor movement have also had different ideological and social groundings, which led to tension and controversy as organizing circles overlapped and at times conflicted. In particular, the rivalry in the union movement between the AFL and CIO federations led to strife within certain union organizing drives and in some cases disrupted charter agreements.<sup>91</sup> Despite relative similarities between the organizations, the two federations raced in competition with one another to increase membership. Eventually, strife between the CIO delegates and craft union supporters within the AFL would come to the fore. Further examples included the formation of an AFL-affiliated UAW that broke from the CIO in 1940, and the ILGWU left the CIO in 1938 after the union director fought with then CIO President John L. Lewis.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, tensions between Communist or Left-affiliated leadership and rank-and-file membership in the CIO would eventually cause membership to split on ideological grounds. Communist Party unionists played a significant role in expanding and galvanizing the union movement.<sup>93</sup> Strife between Communist and non-Communist union members and organizers had complex roots, and in many cases led to intense rivalries between workers.<sup>94</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> Goldfield, “Worker Insurgency,” 1269-1270.

<sup>91</sup> Goldfield, “Worker Insurgency,” 1296.

<sup>92</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 94, 100.

<sup>93</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 254, 255; Michael Kazin, “The Paradox of American Communism, 1920s-1950s,” in *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 170, 174.

<sup>94</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 257; Kazin, “The Paradox of American Communism, 1920s-1950s,” 175.

development of anti-Communist policies in the 1940s and 1950s would affect working class solidarity on a broad level, and the CIO would come to expel some eleven unions.<sup>95</sup>

Not only did strife take place within unions due to allegiances to differing federations and ideological foundations, but union movements in large part discriminated against people of color and women. Craft unionism practiced within the AFL openly excluded men of color despite non-discrimination declarations, and deliberately neglected to organize women.<sup>96</sup> Many union organizers and workers alike admired the CIO for the organization's policy of non-discrimination; the federation accepted black workers within particular unions and organized many majority women locals. The overwhelming reality though was that discrimination still persisted in particular locals and unions as "CIO leaders regarded black workers as something of an exotic afterthought rather than as central to the industrial union project."<sup>97</sup> For example, the UAW-CIO had significant trouble organizing the Ford Baton Rouge plant because the union had little appreciation for the some 10,000 black members in the end. Eventually, the UAW would represent these workers, but not without significant controversy.<sup>98</sup> The CIO also attempted to organize large sections of the mass production industries located in the South. Despite the intent of "Operation Dixie," CIO union organizers had trouble making any gain in union membership or contract negotiations due to insufficient understandings of labor relations amongst black and white workers and the Southern Political system.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> For a well-rounded explanation of the CIO and the Communist Party, refer to Robert Zieger, "The CIO and Its Communists," in *The CIO: 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 253.

<sup>96</sup> Michael D. Yates, *Why Unions Matter?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 152.

<sup>97</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 114.

<sup>98</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 120-123.

<sup>99</sup> For an examination of "Operation Dixie," race and CIO labor politics, refer to Robert Zieger. *The CIO: 1935-1955*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Likewise, women's participation in unions was largely ignored in CIO unions. As Zieger comments, "If men leading the CIO charge were cautious on the issue of race, they were virtually silent regarding gender."<sup>100</sup> What is clear is that gendered divisions in job classifications affected union organization, as unionists undervalued 'women's work', and restricted women's access to male-dominated fields.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, larger discussions of the sexual division of labor and women's predominant role in child-rearing were virtually absent in union discourse.<sup>102</sup> Even as white women entered the labor market in large numbers beginning in the 1930s, little change took place concerning the stigma of what constituted 'women's work'.<sup>103</sup> As Domosh and Seager explain, "The relationship between "women" and "work" is [ ] complex and controversial, and is often a flashpoint for personal and social conflict between women and men."<sup>104</sup> This conflict broadly affected women's participation or position within the union movement.

Moreover, black women's labor was under-valued within a variety of union histories and labor movement narratives. Due to particular racialized meanings of work, black women have often occupied the lowest-paid positions and most unfavorable jobs.<sup>105</sup> Despite making significant in-roads within particular sectors of the economy such as factory jobs, service

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<sup>100</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 86.

<sup>101</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 122.

<sup>102</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*, 122.

<sup>103</sup> Mona Domosh, and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 36; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), 199; Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*, 82.

<sup>104</sup> Domosh and Seager, *Putting Women in Place*, 36.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 196.

positions, and agricultural labor prior the Great Depression, many black women lost their jobs due to mens' rising unemployment. As Jones explains, "Although the financial needs of black families intensified during the Great Depression, black women's labor-force participation dropped from 42 percent in 1930 to 37.8 percent ten years later, reflecting their diminished work opportunities."<sup>106</sup> In all, black women constituted 60 percent of domestic laborers. When they were able to gain factory and service employment, black women were subjected to the "last hired, first fired" rule along with often deplorable working conditions. Most had very little access to unionized employment.

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#### Unionism, the Question of Empowerment, and Movements

Particular union locals and federations formulated racialized and gendered meanings of citizenship through labor actions that led to the exclusion of some workers by others. Pervasive was the idea that many workers of color constituted a 'scab race', and white native and ethnic communities alike systemically discriminated against workers of color. Nonetheless, Black workers played important roles within many unions, including the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the ILGWU, the UMW, the UAW, railroad and shipyard associations, and others.<sup>107</sup> Overall, Black workers constituted 25 percent of the packinghouse workers in Chicago stockyards and 15 percent of steelworkers within the CIO.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, significant unemployment did not prevent black women from taking roles within the union movement. In

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<sup>106</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 197.

<sup>107</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 83; Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 115-118, 119-123, 125.

<sup>108</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 83.

particular, slack women occupied central roles in CIO unions such as the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPAW), and sharecropping associations in the South.<sup>109</sup>

Women in general moved into the labor market in large numbers, as white women attempted to counter-act the effects of unemployment within their families by moving into the paid labor force.<sup>110</sup> Women took active roles within their workplaces, and many became veteran union organizers and activists. As Cobble notes, labor feminists took seriously issues of policy development and workplace activism. She states that women labor activists “believed in the importance of labor institutions both as vehicles for democracy in the workplace and as mechanisms of economic redistribution.”<sup>111</sup> Labor feminists thought unions “were necessary for [labor] laws to be more than formal abstract rights.”<sup>112</sup> Women occupied central roles within particular unions such as the UAW, the Communications Workers of America, and the UPAW, while countless others raised labor concerns as clerical, secretarial or manufacturing workers, including within the textile and clothing industries.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, women’s auxiliaries within the CIO played central roles in strike and community labor activities. These auxiliaries took seriously the role of gender politics within work and local communities.<sup>114</sup> Women never made up more than 9 percent of union membership in the 1930s, but scholars Dana Frank and Elizabeth Faue comment that “The story might have been different [] had organized labor

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<sup>109</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 109.

<sup>110</sup> Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 199.

<sup>111</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 59.

<sup>113</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 18, 22, 32, 37; Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 199.

<sup>114</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 25.

adopted more community-based organizational forms and had their leadership been more attuned to the distinct needs and culture of women in the family as well as in the wage sphere.”<sup>115</sup>

Altogether, union organizations widely practiced various forms of discrimination. Yet despite the labor and union movements’ shortcomings, many workers of color and women were able to use union resources and movement networks to their advantage. Not only did particular national unions support anti-discrimination policies, but local union shops varied in their practices, making discrimination as well as more supportive socio-political environments a contextual and often place-centered phenomenon.<sup>116</sup> Some union locals recognized the importance of diverse working communities and group formations developed in accordance with local practices. In addition, those with particular social needs and unequal experiences demanded to be recognized through their time in the labor movement. In the end, unions played a key role in the articulation of working peoples’ social citizenship.

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#### New Deal Labor Movements: Towards a Politics of Becoming

The poor condition of those living in the U.S. during the early years of the New Deal cannot be understated. The American public demanded change at the institutional level, and many advocated for new political leadership that would direct the American people toward socio-economic stability. The election of President Roosevelt holds great significance for many New Deal scholars, as they seek to understand the impact of his political savvy, rhetorical tools in communicating to the public, and his overall strategy in handling the particular socio-historical context of the depression years. Congress and the president significantly changed

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<sup>115</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement*, 16.

<sup>116</sup> Herod, Andrew, “Labor Unions and Economic Geography,” in *A Companion to Economic Geography*, edited by Eric Sheppard and Trevor J. Barnes (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), 341.

political and economic policies that affected the social and political terrain of the U.S. Political leaders altered the banking and financial industry, and established major new economic and social programs throughout the decade. An analysis of the New Deal would not be complete without the inclusion of socio-economic and cultural formations that developed within communities and workplaces. Although social movements had a diverse array of political and economic ideologies and strategies, the overall shift in the amount of community organizing is clear. Whether focused on labor conditions, unionization, unemployment issues, or specific community grievances, social movements stand as an important marker and source of change that took place during the New Deal.<sup>117</sup>

U.S. labor politics changed substantially in the 1930s. The AFL limited the use of strikes, and noticeably excluded people of color and women. The creation and development of the CIO incorporated mass production workers within the labor movement through grassroots organizing that had broad support amongst the American public. Although some union and labor organizations discriminated against people of color and women, others acted as a social and political vehicle to elicit change.<sup>118</sup> Many communities demanded cultural recognition, and as with the example of labor feminists, were able to voice their economic and material concerns. Many found economic security through the establishment of union bodies.

Overall, union organizing within the CIO, along with significant increases in strike activity during the 1930s and 1940s provides a basis for greater analysis of social citizenship formations than strictly a legal analysis focused on New Deal social policy. Not only can social movement analyses provide further understandings of exploitation, but that analysis can help us explore social citizenship in a different capacity than within the dominant liberal tradition. Social

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<sup>117</sup> Goldfield, "Worker Insurgency," 1269.

<sup>118</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*, 59.



movement activism within labor circles interacted with law and other channels such as the CIO and the political system in a complex way in order to argue for the redistribution of resources. A majority of these struggles dealt with class formations, and a significant amount of organizing incorporated different group identity claims to resources. Although many communities have argued for human rights guarantees, the persistence of exploitation showcases the limitations of state-centered social citizenship. Many social groups, particularly within socio-cultural movements, have argued for the inclusion of their communities in social policy. I argue that class formations and subjectivities changed the social relationships of workers and community members while actively seeking the redistribution of resources. This activism, though conditional and contextual in itself, has the potential to redefine how we imagine citizenship, and how we interpret social claims to resources. Worker struggles during the New Deal showcased a different type of citizenship; one based within the act of collective struggle. The performance of citizenship within these contexts diverged from previous subjectivities, and helped to give voice to those concerned over their socio-economic well-being through the day-to-day practices of community and workplace organizing.

### **Chapter Three: Chicago Meatpacking, the PWOC, and Citizenship**

The economic and social developments within the 1930s made organizing within certain communities a common occurrence. Whether participating in unemployed councils, populist societies, or labor circles, New Deal social movements reflected the economic and political shifts of the era. Citizen-subject formations also changed considerably going into the 1930s. Citizens that had once been content with the state's facilitation of laissez-faire capitalism became critical of corporate welfare practices. The social and economic conditions experienced by those living in the U.S. provoked many otherwise tacit subjects to advocate and even demand better conditions within their communities and working lives. The discourse on citizenship and concerns over socio-economic policies at this time went through noticeable transformations.

The changes in citizen-subject formations affected those active in the labor movements of the New Deal. As referenced earlier, work provided avenues to citizenship given the prevailing ideologies of free labor, and the historical lack of social policy in the U.S. With growing unemployment and tense labor conditions in many industries, workers and community members alike expressed worry over their qualities of life and their lack of access to even the most basic of resources. In numerous localities, workers organized within labor associations and many advocated for unionism as a vehicle to transform their social and material lives. These struggles focused not only on work grievances, but also peoples' experiences of race and gender which visibly influenced their circumstances on-the-job along with local economic and political practices. The use of collective voice by these associations, and their subsequent industrial organizing at the local level, illustrates the changes in citizenship-subject formations in which group associations transformed their subjectivities by collectively engaging in social and

economic politics in the workplace. Workers engaged in a politics of becoming through the performance of citizenship that later affected workers' material condition.

This chapter discusses union organizing in the Chicago meatpacking during the New Deal by first summarizing the establishment of the industry in greater detail. After cataloging the creation of the local industry and prevailing practices, the chapter describes conditions within the communities around the packinghouses. Notably, the conditions within the plants at this time influenced the formation of a specific set of subjectivities that formed in response to prevailing practices of welfare capitalism and the anti-union efforts by the packers. The predominant belief in welfare capitalism by many workers in the stockyards intersected with practices of racial segregation and violence in and around the packinghouses. Rising unemployment and organizing within the larger labor movement changed these conditions. Company run unions and managers' benevolence came under scrutiny. By 1934, the Stockyards Labor Council (SLC), the Packinghouses Workers Industrial Union (PHWIU), and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butchers Workmen of North America (AMC) fostered dynamic leadership that coordinated workplace actions in support of unionization. The "militant minority" within these unions helped to facilitate workplace stoppages at the point of production in direct opposition to management. Lower wages, on-the-job conditions, and demands to speed up production alienated many workers. Many of local workplace actions attempted to settle these grievances. In addition, labor activists and rank-and-file workers promoted unionism throughout the communities around the yards. Solidarity at the point of production and within working class communities bridged racial and ethnic divisions. Through continued organizing efforts in the small and big packinghouse companies, the PWOC came to represent the majority of the work force in Chicago by 1943.

I argue that union organization and rank-and-file activism changed citizen-subject formations, and that their actions represented a politics of becoming. As new labor organizations formed and the socialization of workers within departments and community activities unfolded, workers in the meatpacking industry as a collective transformed their subjectivities. The workers voiced their concerns for their social well-being, and organized to secure economic security within union bodies and local politics within Chicago. This chapter thus aims to show that social citizenship is indeed a transformative theoretical model, while still recognizing the varying degrees in which citizenship is experienced by different communities.

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#### Chicago and Meatpacking: A Brief Overview

The butcher industry of Chicago transformed with the construction of packing facilities on the South Eastern side of the city. The isolation of production in the urban setting of Chicago meant that packinghouses and related buildings had to be much bigger than rural facilities in order to have the capacity to process animals in a smaller geographical area. Buildings had to be large enough so that carcasses could move throughout the venues.<sup>119</sup> The packers improved the consistency of production with the advent of the industrial and rail freezer in the early 1900s. Prior to that, the industry mainly operated in the winter months, with production down time in hotter periods. The introduction of farming pens near the yards led to an increase in production capacity as well. Prior to factory pen, packers networked with local livestock breeders set outside of town, and then brought the livestock to the facilities by rail. As Halpern describes, “The new complex [of facility buildings and pens] eliminated these difficulties and allowed a tenfold

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<sup>119</sup> Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997), 9.

increase in capacity.”<sup>120</sup> The invention of freezers and in-city livestock pens allowed for not only the expansion but also the restructuring of meatpacking firms, and the processing of thousands of animals each day.

The growth of the packing industry provided employment for many within Chicago and those recently migrated to the city. In 1900, the industry nationally employed about 70,000 workers, and by 1925, packers employed roughly 125,000 people throughout the mid-Western U.S.<sup>121</sup> With year round production possible, the Big Four packinghouses – made up of the namesakes Philip Armour, Gustavus Swift, Nelson Morris, and Michael Cudahy- and smaller companies searched for new ways to organize the labor process in order to boost efficiency.<sup>122</sup> Meatpacking had relatively low financial returns as compared to other industrial markets. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, packing owners took discernible steps to reduce the cost of labor and maintain growth in production to make up for market shortcomings.

For workers, the pressure to produce more meant longer hours of intense, hard labor; workers processed goods for up to twelve hours a day. Even though the industry employed a lot of people, work was less available during certain seasons, with significant downtime for many in the spring and summer months.<sup>123</sup> Unlike the well-known assembly-lines within the auto, rubber and communications industries, the meatpacking production model prioritized the separation of various activities by department while preserving the flow of goods throughout the facilities. The labor model developed largely due to the inconsistencies of animal size and shape, which made

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<sup>120</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 11.

<sup>121</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 16, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 8.

<sup>123</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 10.

advances in the mechanization of the industry difficult unlike other manufacturing enterprises. The “disassembly” line allowed, “The packers to institute an unprecedented division of labor in their plants. This process systematically destroyed the all-around skills of the butcher, reducing a complicated craft to routinized meatcutting.”<sup>124</sup> That is not to say mechanization did not exist at all in the industry. In fact the pressure of the line or chains that transported carcasses throughout the buildings was notorious throughout Chicago. About 20 percent of the work force took part in mechanical work.<sup>125</sup>

Packers explored new ways to organize the assembly-line in order to boost efficiency and raise profits.<sup>126</sup> Production within the facilities began at the top of the buildings, where animals were transported by chain for initial slaughter. The majority of animals killed and packaged for consumption within the industry were cattle and hogs. Workers on the kill floors were known for their skill and efficiency. After initial slaughter, the carcass would then be transported by chain to other departments in which a series of cuts and trims would be performed on the meat. While cuts of meat chilled in the industrial-sized freezers, other parts of the carcass were transported down each level of the building by either mechanical line or holes within the floors that led to various departments. The carcass would then be dismembered, processed and packaged for sale. The packers used this type of labor assembly in order to boost efficiency, and to exert control over the working population.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Roger Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”: A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-90* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 17; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 8, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 12.

<sup>126</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 8.

<sup>127</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 9.

Many of the tasks within meatpacking were defined as unskilled labor. Workers performed such jobs as slaughtering, meat cutting and trimming, carcass and organ separation, and chilling. The deskilling of work within the stockyards affected compensation levels for many workers, and rank-and-file relationships often formed by department. The expansion of meatpacking into other markets in the 1910s and 1920s expanded production into leather works, fertilizer processing, and lard manufacturing.<sup>128</sup> To be sure, semi-skilled and skilled positions did exist within the packinghouses. Packers relied heavily on butchers including some who had a history of amalgamation in the city. In order to regulate butchers and exert control over these departments, packers relied on the mechanical line. This made places like the kill floors a fast paced work environment. Nonetheless, initial slaughter and meat cutting positions paid more than others throughout the packinghouses, and provided relative security and status for many of the workers.<sup>129</sup> Other skilled positions provided workers cleaner spaces, and afforded them higher status within the plant and surrounding communities. For instance, the mechanical and shipping departments allowed workers to escape the line and acquire skills otherwise unattainable. Overall, the division of labor instituted by the packers was a precise attempt to exert influence over the labor force that led many economic and political commentators to study the production line at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>130</sup> Although some scholars have questioned the efficiency of the model, there is no doubt the organization of work departments affected laboring conditions and relationships between the rank-and-file and management.

The dominance of the meatpacking industry in Chicago also made the development of community networks and housing a labor-centered process. The packers hired a great deal of

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<sup>128</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 13, 14.

<sup>129</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 24; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 17, 19.

<sup>130</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 17.

newly immigrated Europeans in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to suppress wages in the industry. White ethnic workers congregated in the “Back of the Yards” or a tight-knit community initially comprised of a majority Irish and German families. By the 1920s, the Back of the Yards included recently immigrated Polish and Slavic communities. The Irish and German residents had a long history of working within the stockyards which afforded them a certain amount of power and prestige, whereas large populations of recently immigrated Eastern Europeans just began to make inroads into the yards. The Back of the Yards was not only a housing development, but also included religious institutions, retail shops, social houses, and athletic clubs. The Back of the Yards relied on the unpaid labor of both women and children.<sup>131</sup> Household duties, along with resource management and the creation of homemade goods consumed a majority of women’s time. Many female teenagers also worked alongside married women within the stockyards; 2,000 ethnic women worked in the packinghouses by 1930.<sup>132</sup>

White ethnic communities varied by ideologies, cultural practices, and understandings of Americanism. More established communities often aspired for assimilation into the native white communities of Chicago. The growth of Irish and German social clubs and political organizations helped to solidify their sense of American identity. In contrast, those in the Polish community, making up one-third of the Back of the Yards by 1930, sought to retain their unique social practices and cultural heritage. The anti-assimilationist aspirations of the Polish often divided white ethnic workers in the early part of the century. Despite clear differences within

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<sup>131</sup> Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”*, 61.

<sup>132</sup> Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”*, 61



white ethnic communities, the Catholic Church and related religious activities helped to bridge many of these divisions.<sup>133</sup>

A large black community also developed near the stockyards. From the early 1900s to the 1930s, blacks migrated to the city in order to escape the reach of Jim Crow practices, and the underemployment that characterized their experiences in the South. The Great Migration of blacks to the North was a “peoples’ movement,” as “migrants and potential migrants responded eagerly to the war-engendered hope of finding economic gain, personal security, and educational opportunity denied them in the South.”<sup>134</sup> Once in Chicago, many blacks found that meatpacking was the only work available to them, and by 1918, roughly 10,000 blacks worked within the stockyards.<sup>135</sup> Labeled the ‘Black Belt’ of Chicago, the construction of the South Side neighborhood reflected white residents’ informal practices of segregation. Horowitz recounts that, “Railroad yards, warehouses, and a hostile Irish neighborhood [physically] lay between the Back of the Yards and the South Side black neighborhood a mile directly east” of the packinghouses.<sup>136</sup> Different strategies of housing segregation by white locals and abiding agencies, “confined the prewar black population and new migrants alike to constricted enclaves that quickly became overcrowded and run-down.”<sup>137</sup> Blacks that ventured to other parts of the city experienced exclusion within public places of service, and were often met with violence for crossing neighborhood boundaries. The concentration of poverty and the lack of opportunities for many meant that neighborhood schools, recreational facilities, places of entertainment, and

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<sup>133</sup> Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”*, 62.

<sup>134</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 71.

<sup>135</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”*, 63.

<sup>137</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 72.

commercial departments suffered from a lack of resources.<sup>138</sup> By 1919, the Black Belt had become a “festering slum” due to the institutional and cultural practices of segregation. To be sure, the black community did exhibit considerable resilience in dealing with the day-to-day acts of discrimination and violence from white communities. A growing set of black owned businesses, social halls, athletic clubs and religious organizations flourished in the South Side of Chicago. The black community also organized in response to segregation. Boycotts such as the “Don’t Spend Your Money Where You Can’t Work” campaign, and similar activities repudiated discrimination. These campaigns had success in making incremental changes in white institutions, and helped to expand political and social organizations within the black community.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, cultural and social segregation persisted.

Meatpacking provided an opportunity for many blacks to enter into stable, working class status. Black workers were more readily able to enter semi-skilled and skilled positions within the packinghouses in comparison to other industries and trades. Horowitz describes that, “With close to half of the 4,500 black packinghouse workers in 1930 classified as semiskilled butchers, Chicago’s stockyards offered one of the best advancement routes to a respectable working class status.”<sup>140</sup> In fact, up to ninety-percent of those on the killing floors were black.<sup>141</sup>

To be sure, black workers experienced verbal and physical abuse in the yards at all skill levels.<sup>142</sup> White coworkers and managers refused to train black coworkers, and whites restricted

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<sup>138</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 72; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 65.

<sup>139</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 107.

<sup>140</sup> Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”, 63; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 79.

<sup>141</sup> Paul Street, “The Logic and Limits of “Plant Loyalty”: Black Workers, White Labor, and Corporate Racial Paternalism in Chicago’s Stockyards, 1916-1940.” *Journal of Social History*, 29 No. 3 (1996): 664.

<sup>142</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 79.

the flow of knowledge concerning certain skills. The supervisor-heavy environment of the packinghouses meant that blacks had to navigate through white managerial networks, and to stay in good-standing with foremen in order to have a chance in advancing to higher paying positions. Management discharged black workers at higher rates than whites during off seasons, and used strategies to facilitate the layoff of workers of color such as putting stars on time cards and hiring paperwork. The layoff system stood as one of the most long-standing grievances of black employees.<sup>143</sup> In addition, black workers were segregated from white facilities such as change rooms and bath houses, and often restricted from entering certain departments. Black facilities were notoriously unkempt, and lacked adequate heating and water systems. In general, black workers labored in the dirtiest and foulest positions in the plant.<sup>144</sup> Although the kill floors provided more secure employment and higher pay, these departments were, “notorious for [the] blood-spattered dispatch and evisceration of terrified animals.”<sup>145</sup> These conditions explained blacks’ prevalence in these and like departments.

Black women also faced ample discrimination within Chicago, although they were three times more likely than white women to be in the paid labor force.<sup>146</sup> Even though the majority of black women worked as domestic laborers in the city, a large portion of women were also able to find employment within the stockyards. Many of the same problems that plagued black men within the yards affected black women; they toiled in dirty and depressive conditions, were segregated from white facilities, and had difficulty advancing in pay and job titles within the

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<sup>143</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 80.

<sup>144</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 81.

<sup>145</sup> Street, “The Logic and Limits of “Plant Loyalty”,” 664.

<sup>146</sup> Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”, 64.

industry. The segregation of black women by departments was much more stark compared to their male counterparts. Unlike white ethnic women who occupied positions within more favorable departments such as sliced bacon or the oleomargarine division, black women generally labored in the offal and casing rooms in which they routed organs of the divided carcasses to different rooms of the factory. Due to the moist, sticky, and wet conditions within these particular departments, black women were more likely than other workers to suffer “from debilitating conditions such as pneumonia, rheumatism, and arthritis.”<sup>147</sup> There were some job positions available to black women that offered security, respect and better pay. For example, those women that were able to make their way into the mechanical division “could learn valuable skills and escape the grueling pressure of the production line.”<sup>148</sup> Altogether though, black women remained in unskilled positions and suffered from gender and racial discrimination throughout the stockyards.

The hiring of black workers reflected the packers’ further attempt at reducing the cost of labor.<sup>149</sup> By maintaining divisions amongst the work force, packers incited workplace competition amongst racial and ethnic groups, and thus “black occupational advancement occurred within a context of resentment and prejudice, especially on the killing floor.”<sup>150</sup> Even the structural layout of the departments, divided by race and gender identity and varying degrees of skill level, exacerbated workplace tensions. Discrimination on-the-job also reinforced the housing and neighborhood segregation that persisted in South Eastern Chicago. The black

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<sup>147</sup> Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>148</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 6; Street, “The Logic and Limits of “Plant Loyalty”,” 664.

<sup>150</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 79.

community in particular relied heavily on the financial and social security that coincided with employment in the packinghouses because of racial discrimination. Street argues:

The relative absence and weakness in the Black belt of the supportive neighborhood culture which the city's white-ethnic communities had developed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (a reflection of the greater poverty, more recent formation, and religious fragmentation of the Black ghetto) meant that Black workers were especially reliant on [the] wages and benefits (especially insurance) provided by the meatpacking industry.<sup>151</sup>

Additionally, black workers' exclusion from other places of employment provided the packers a large supply of labor, and allowed managers the ability to manipulate pay-scales relative to those of the white work force whom could find employment in other industries. A heavy reliance on the meatpacking industry for employment and decent wages meant that many black workers refused to engage in white ethnic labor politics in and around the stockyards.

That is not to say that the packers were inattentive to the development and needs of the black community.<sup>152</sup> Wages for both black men and women were considerably higher than most other positions within the building-trades or mass production industries. The possibility for advancement on the kill floors and within the meat cutting departments and other divisions provided economic security for many black workers. The practice of welfare capitalism by the packers led to better benefits than was the norm in the South. Companies provided many basic social and economic resources to black community members. Swift and Armour and Company for example donated financials resources to black institutions such as the local Urban League, and the all-black Provident Hospital of Chicago. Company-funded programs such as the Efficiency Club of the YMCA helped to provide black workers public infrastructure and

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<sup>151</sup> Street, "The Logic and Limits of "Plant Loyalty"," 664.

<sup>152</sup> Horowitz, "*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*", 64.

community organizations.<sup>153</sup> Overall, the support for black infrastructure on the South Side made the packers a popular political and social contingent within the black community, albeit within a limited sense.

The migration Mexican laborers added to the tensions amongst the work force in the stockyards. Similar to blacks, Mexican workers experienced overt forms of work and neighborhood discrimination, as the majority was forced to settle in neighborhoods South West of the packinghouses. Mexican migrants had very few community associations, as many were new arrivals to Chicago in the 1920s. As Halpern explains, “The majority of Mexicans were single men who had made their way to Chicago as contract laborers on the railroads or as migrant harvest hands.”<sup>154</sup> Most of these workers had only resided within the U.S. for less than five years. Conflict between white and Mexican communities increased with the steady growth of the South West neighborhood. Those Mexican workers able to secure employment in the stockyards “sought access to housing, commercial space, and community services” within their district which aggravated white neighbors and business owners in the Back of the Yards.<sup>155</sup> The white Catholic community also rejected Mexican congregations, and refused to provide important social services, significantly disadvantaging the community and reinforcing segregation.

The separation of the Mexican community from the surrounding neighborhoods made their work within the packinghouses especially complicated. To break through the white ethnic networks throughout the packinghouses proved difficult due to racial and language differences.

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<sup>153</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 65.

<sup>154</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 81.

<sup>155</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 81.

Mexican workers experienced segregation in the yards, and many lacked the ability to move up within departments. This made the majority of available work entry-level. The small contingent of Mexican workers that were able to move into skilled positions did so only because of previous history within other packinghouses in the Midwestern cities of Omaha and Kansas City. Despite this small group of skilled workers, the majority of Mexican workers “held the least desirable jobs, working in the hide cellars, freezers, glue houses, and fertilizer departments [and the workers suffered] at the hands of racist foremen” that insulted them and devalued their labor.<sup>156</sup>

The structure of the assembly line and the social divisions within the stockyards made unionization a challenging process. The packers practiced a variety of forms of union suppression, often in a coordinated fashion across the industry and between companies. Many packers capitalized on the competition between workers to reduce union activity. The implementation of incentive systems became standard across the industry. For example, the Bedaux System “employed complex computations to accord bonus pay to speedy workers” and to provoke competition amongst people.<sup>157</sup> While some departments agreed to limit production numbers in order to maintain a reasonable work pace, others pushed production to gain higher wages.<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, managers and foremen exhibited considerable control over those in the stockyards. Foreman chose to keep or lay off workers, often letting-go of unruly workers or union members during times of low production. Sometimes management would shift undesirable workers throughout different departments of the plant, as well as manipulate their working hours. Overall, the top-down structure of work relationships in meatpacking served to elicit a docile

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<sup>156</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 81.

<sup>157</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 81.

<sup>158</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 80.

labor force and reduce the cost of production while simultaneously warding off worker and union associations.

Two other strategies were used throughout the industry to suppress unionism and maintain control over the work force. Packers practiced welfare capitalism that provided workers higher than usual wages and benefits in comparison to other industries in exchange for their trust in company benevolence. By doing good work and being attentive to the companies' needs, laborers could settle work grievances through managerial networks and company associations while maintaining a favorable position in the stockyards. As Zieger explains, many firms in the 1920s demanded "hard work [from their employees] and [to declare] permanent commitment to industrial labor in exchange for high wages, family security, and participation in the consumer culture."<sup>159</sup> In the case of meatpacking, welfare capitalism manifested as a variety of employee representational systems that facilitated the resolution of workplace issues, and helped to aid in the construction of "credit unions, pension plans, stock ownership [arrangements], and recreational programs."<sup>160</sup>

Several problems surfaced with the existence of employee representation councils otherwise known as company unions. First, the various representational bodies aggravated racial tensions amongst the work force as segregation was maintained within councils. Additionally, management often dictated who could and could not have access to the union.<sup>161</sup> Those workers that were able to take part in the employee representation councils had a limited effect over their working lives. Therefore, the second way in which packers and managers limited union

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<sup>159</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 13.

<sup>160</sup> Horowitz, "*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*", 66.

<sup>161</sup> Horowitz, "*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*", 66.



organization within the packinghouses was through company unions and associations. These unions allowed for modest grievance resolution while also giving managers considerable influence over the work force. Many packinghouse owners did recognize the need of workers in matters of workplace safety, the need for adequate food services, and even sporting programs. But as Halpern concludes, company unions in meatpacking handled, “grievances on an individual rather than a collective basis, [and] the system served to isolate workers from one another. Plainly the company union never served as any kind of bargaining agent” for workers.<sup>162</sup>

The fragmentation of the labor force made union organizing within meatpacking difficult, despite significant calls in the 1920s for improved conditions and dignity. Labor organizers ran into obstacles in organizing. Trade unions within Chicago and other Northern cities were known for their practices of racial discrimination in the early 1900s, and unions restricted the involvement of those of color within local shops and community associations.<sup>163</sup> The AFL locals in particular were known for discriminating against those of color, as the federation promoted white-only craft unionism at the national level. To be sure, union organizers in meatpacking called for interracial unionism in the post-World War I era, and many other unions in Northern cities organized across racial lines by “a variety of institutional devices, [as they] struggled, albeit with mixed success, to build unions that transcended the color line.”<sup>164</sup>

Union organizers in the stockyards during the years of 1916-1924 meant to highlight the dreadful conditions within the packinghouses throughout Chicago, and advocated for interracial

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<sup>162</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 86; Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*, 26.

<sup>163</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 73.

<sup>164</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 81.

cooperation to settle work grievances.<sup>165</sup> Despite the prevailing claim that welfare capitalism and company unionism had helped workers prosper, many in the packinghouses felt disenfranchised, especially those of color and women. Paternalistic managerial practices, poor working conditions, work speed-ups, lowered wages, and inadequate benefits prompted many workers to attempt to organize union locals. The main advocates for unionism within this time-period were the AMC and the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL). Both associations recognized the need to incorporate black workers within the union.<sup>166</sup> Because a large portion of black workers labored in the “animal pens, slaughterhouses, disassembly lines, and packing sheds,” their jobs were critical to the production process.<sup>167</sup> These workers were able to control the flow of production throughout the building, and they wielded considerable influence as skilled and semi-skilled workers. The SLC would later join the AMC and CFL to add resources and breadth to the worker movement during this time.

Though many white unionists encouraged unionization, those activists in the stockyards of 1920 failed to organize interracial associations. The fragmentation of the labor force made union organizing within meatpacking difficult regardless of working conditions. Labor activists encountered obstacles in coordinating actions at the point of production as racial and ethnic groups stood in opposition to one another. The small contingent of black workers that joined union activities did not outweigh the effects of segregation within the surrounding communities and union locals. Phillip Weightmen summarizes his experience with unionism as a young black man in the 1920s:

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<sup>165</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 81.

<sup>166</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 71.

<sup>167</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 81.

You know they had a strike, the 1921 packing strike. It was a nasty thing. They lost. They lost, and we suffered humiliation. It was a paper union. They used to have booths, just like where they sell newspapers, where you come and pay your dues. No association with the workers, just a dues-collecting setup. No relationship.

I was there and paid my dues. I was a member of the Amalgamated. In that first Labor Day parade after the war, after the parade was over we were all lined up at our headquarters. I'm a youngster, lined up to get a sandwich. When I got up there, the guy looked at me and said, "We don't feed you in this line." I said, "What? You don't serve me in this line?" I looked over there, there were blacks in that line. I wasn't accustomed to that. In Mississippi, yeah, but I thought I had got away from that! I had participated with whites in doing things that ordinary blacks wouldn't do. I wasn't thinking about race – this, that, and the other race. What the hell! The question was fighting the boss, trying to get away from the twenty-seven and half cents an hour! I didn't realize all of that-- young and foolish, imbued with unionism and marching. So I walked out of that hall. That stayed in my craw; it was miserable. It destroyed my desire for unionism. I didn't want to see unionism coming or going. If somebody talked to me about a union, I would almost call him a bastard or something.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to segregation within union facilities, white workers' perpetuation of violence directed toward black workers and families within the stockyard communities prompted many black workers to cross picket lines. White ethnic communities continued to treat workers of color with disdain, and white stereotypes of workers of color as a 'scab race' or inherently loyal to the plant owners circulated throughout the Back of the Yards. Gertie Kamarczyk explains their interpretation of the 1920-1921 strike while working within the plants as a canning room operative:

We didn't understand why they went to work when we were out, and I guess they just couldn't trust the white people. We just didn't understand, and they didn't understand. We lost the union because of that, and I didn't think we was ever going to have one again, not with so many coloreds in there. I just thought I'd be slaving away till I died.<sup>169</sup>

White discrimination against black workers and the exclusion of workers of color within the labor movement represented an even deeper trend within white ethnic circles. Zieger argues that:

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<sup>168</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 35.

<sup>169</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 35; Gertie Kamarczyk interview with Rick Halpern, December 15, 1987.

It often seemed that common hostility toward African Americans was a central component of their hope of being considered ‘American.’ They learned “American ways” from native-born workers and from earlier immigrants, notably the Irish, and among the most prominent lessons were the fear and hatred of Blacks.<sup>170</sup>

Segregation within the communities surrounding the stockyards represented prevailing ideologies of citizenship. The further discrimination and violence against workers of color gave blacks significant reason to see “white workers as hostile, even lethal opponents” on the production line.<sup>171</sup> Racial divisions intensified after the failure of the 1920-1921 strike, and relationships between white ethnic and black workers on the production line continued to be fractious into the 1930s. John Wrublewski summarizes that:

When I first started the older white guys didn’t talk to the Negroes, didn’t share their locker room. Just wouldn’t have anything to do with them. The guys on the floor who had gone through the strike was still nursing their wounds and their pride all them years later. It was eatin’ away at them, and to hear them tell it, those Negroes had committed the greatest sin possible and there simply was no forgiveness, at least not in this world.<sup>172</sup>

As a result, the union movement within Chicago meatpacking in the post-World War I period dissolved, and work associations in the industry would remain weak into the New Deal era.<sup>173</sup>

In summary, the meatpacking industry of Chicago matured into a bustling industrial center by the 1920s which substantially influenced the surrounding areas of the city. The meatpacking work force included diverse communities that found homes in the areas surrounding the packinghouses, which included the Back of the Yards, the Black Belt, and the South West Mexican neighborhood. These communities were significantly fragmented, as various white ethnic groups diverged in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds, and the

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<sup>170</sup> Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom*, 83.

<sup>171</sup> Street, “The Logic and Limits of “Plant Loyalty”,” 665.

<sup>172</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 39; John Wrublewski interview with Rick Halpern, April 28, 1988.

<sup>173</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 68.

generational differences between immigrant communities affected social and work practices. Despite these differences, white ethnic communities distanced themselves from emerging black and Mexican communities.

Black and Mexican workers found financial and social stability working within the stockyards regardless of segregation. Workers of color were not only able to find well-paying jobs within the plants, but they also received benefits inaccessible in other industries. Additionally, women were able to find gainful employment within the facilities, making up the clerical and shipping staff, sliced-bacon and oleomargarine divisions, the offal and casing departments, and a portion of the mechanical team. Packinghouse owners donated to stockyard communities which provided social stability and economic support for many working class individuals and families.

The growth of the packinghouse work force coincided with the division of labor into task-specific departments that separated workers by ethnic, race and gender identity. The structure of these departments and the use of mechanical lines that facilitated the flow of production throughout the packinghouses allowed managers to exert considerable pressure over the pace of work. Packers in large part benefitted from work-speed ups, and the racial and gendered separation increased competition between individual workers. Labor organizations in the post-World War I period failed because of the segregation of plant and union facilities that alienated workers of color. Furthermore, white ethnic communities' belief in stereotypes of black and Mexican workers as a 'scab race' or loyal to the plant prompted many workers of color to remain anti-union. White workers maintained racial segregation as access to decent employment reflected hopes for racialized citizenship.

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### The Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee

The Great Depression drastically changed social and economic conditions within the U.S. By the 1930s, community members, workers and the unemployed gathered in political and social organizations at higher rates than before in order to express their dissatisfaction with their socio-economic realities. Decreases in wages, cuts in benefits, and mass layoffs strained relationships between workers and management throughout the mass production industries. Local social and relief agencies throughout the U.S. were unable to accommodate the growing amount of unemployed or citizens that qualified as needy. Welfare capitalists came under scrutiny from political officials and the broader American public. Zieger explains that social organization in response to the Great Depression and rising unemployment “overwhelmed even the most conscientious efforts of employers and government officials to maintain employment and wage levels.”<sup>174</sup>

Initial labor organizing efforts in the meatpacking industry had roots within the social movements in the U.S. and within the local neighborhoods of Chicago. The unemployed and those concerned for their livelihoods congregated in public spaces to discuss economic and political policies that affected local and national communities. The exchange of ideas and resources through these networks helped to expand citizens’ consciousness and foster solidarity across communities otherwise unlikely to have interacted within the city. For instance, local CP activists participated in political discussions and social organizations; leftists soapboxed within Washington Park or outside of popular venues about class consciousness and worker organization. CP leadership in Chicago strengthened during this time. Many CP members joined along with the Unemployed Councils and social cooperative financial networks in the

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<sup>174</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 13.

coordination of marches and direct action efforts to help people stave off foreclosure. Unemployed Councils also gathered food and other supplies to be donated to families and the jobless within Chicago. The majority of those within these organizations, however, “had no specific political orientation; they gravitated to the [unemployed] council out of desperation,” engaging with alternative political and social ideas for the first time.<sup>175</sup> All things considered, the Great Depression prompted many to engage in local and national politics, with unemployed and leftist social activism occupying a central role in the creation of public discourse concerned with poverty and economic inequality.

Union organization in response to the socio-economic conditions of those in the meatpacking industry began in the early 1930s. Great Depression organizing and protests indeed “provided both the atmosphere and the initial recruits for advocates of working class collective action to once again make inroads into the stockyards.”<sup>176</sup> Workers within the stockyards entertained unionism largely due to poor working conditions within the packinghouses, along with the successes of the larger labor movement across the U.S. In addition, Communists found employment within the stockyards in the early years of the New Deal and advocated for unionism on-the-job. Managers increased pressure on workers to improve production, and continued to assert considerable influence over hiring practices throughout the yards. Initial union organizers advocated for interracial solidarity on the shop-floor, and developed various strategies to ensure cooperation amongst workers. Herbert March describes that:

And one of the first things the guys very consciously did when we started to build the union was bringing in the black guys, giving them leadership costs. From the beginning.

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<sup>175</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 101-111.

<sup>176</sup> Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”, 68.

It just made sense that if you're going to have a union, everybody's got to be in it and we've got to work together.<sup>177</sup>

Emerging union supporters often felt that others were relieved from their jobs with little concern for the workers' social and economic needs. Layoffs coincided with an atmosphere of resentment for managers' strategies to reduce labor costs. Phillip Weightmen describes his experience in deciding to join with the union after an initial meeting with union activists:

...So I go to this meeting. And Lord God! What do you think they had? There were three men with Coca Cola cases to sit on. Three cases. One for me, one for this fellow that took me there, and the other. [laughing] That was the meeting! I said, "What the hell is this? Is this the meeting?"

So I went back in the plant a little discouraged and disgusted, but I told nobody about the meeting or anything. I went to several meetings, and the same thing was occurring. There was a guy working next to me named Carson. He was a fellow hog header, and this particular day the foreman came over to Carson and said, "Carson, I want to see you at the doctor's office." I said, "Have you been to the doctor, Carson? Something wrong with you?" "No." So he went to the doctor's office, and when he came back I said, "What happened?" He said, "Phil, I'm fired." "What, you're fired? Why are you fired?" He said, "Swift and Company says I'm too great a risk. But they said they'll get me a job at another packinghouse." I went to my foreman and said, "Have you found any cause to feel that Carson is unable to do his job?" He said, "Wait a minute, Phil, I didn't have anything to do with this; this is the hand of the doctor. If the doctor say you can't work for Swift and Company, you cannot work for Swift and Company." So I said, "That could apply to me. That could apply to anybody in here, right?" He said, "That's right."

So when I got to the next meeting, I said, "I don't want to be an organizer, but tonight I'm joining." I said, "How many members do you have?" "Oh, don't ask me that. I can't tell you that." "Well, the guys who are members, aren't they wearing their [union] buttons?" "Well, we don't want them to wear their buttons, because they might get fired and we can't help them." I said, "OK, give me my button, give me about six buttons." The next morning the six buttons were put all around my cap! And my foreman walked up to that bench where I was working, and he saw that and he broke and run like a scared jackass! He went to the phone and called the division superintendent. And when he came up, he stood back a few minutes and gave me the intimidating look. Stood behind me and looked me up and he looked me down. And I'm laughing at him! I deliberately laughed at him! [laughs]

Then finally he came up and said to me, "Why did you join the union? Tell me one reason why did you join the union. You got everything you ask for." I said, "If I had asked you for a raise, could I have gotten that? I could ask you for a new towel, for some

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<sup>177</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 40-42.



more soap in the washbasin, you would give me that. What about Carson? The doctor called Carson down and said he was a liability to Swift and Company, and you fired him. You can do that to any of us. If I can do anything about it, you ain't going to do that to me nor no one else. From this day on, everybody in this department, 120 workers, is going to be members of this union. I am going to see to that." From that time on, I was a belligerent, evil, cantankerous employee of Swift and Company because they had mistreated a guy that I know was doing his job, because he was working beside me every day of his life. He and I both were doing the same job.<sup>178</sup>

In all, the conditions in the packinghouses coupled with a lack of job security motivated many workers to engage in union organizing.

Other workers participated in New Deal union campaigns in order to reduce on-the-job discrimination against workers of color and women, as well as undo practices of segregation that had plagued the industry since its inception. Sam Parks elaborates on his unions' disruption of workplace activities to change practices of segregation in the Wilson plant:

The sliced bacon department was all lily-white women; the mechanical department was all lily-white men. [The union head] Dock Williams didn't care. Dock never sent no Negroes to sliced bacon. No Negroes worked in them, clean, good departments. Where Negroes worked was the hog offal-that's where the guts and bowels all spill down. Hog kill, beef kill, beef offal, fertilizer department-those were the black jobs in that plant. And I started a crusade. I sent the hog kill down to the company to grieve, to force them to hire some black women in sliced bacon.

I led a bunch of black workers, beef kill and hog kill, with blood on 'em and every other motherfuckin' thing and went into the Wilson office and we sat all on top of the fuckin' desks. Scared the shit out of the superintendent and everybody else. All of them black workers with knives, blood dripping, sweat, scared them poor white women in that office to death! They were screaming; they figured a revolution had come! I said we're not moving till you give us an agreement. And we sat there while they called the national office of Wilson. The answer was, they would hire black women. They had to do it, because I had 'em by their balls. No packing plant's worth a damn without the ability to process the meat. The sliced bacon? You can't slice no bacon if we don't kill no hogs! So I had 'em. And after we got blacks in there, then the white workers saw the strength; they saw that naked power.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 38-39.

<sup>179</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 52.

Park's description outlines the importance of black workers within the production line, and within the union campaigns. The prevalence of black workers on the kill floors allowed them considerable sway in organizing union agendas and actions against management decisions and structural practices within the industry. Furthermore, black labor feminists engaged in direct actions on-the-job, and many black women occupied central roles in the formation of packinghouse unions. Black women helped to shape political associations within the UPWA, and would later facilitate the organization of women's conferences, and black women led the fight for anti-discrimination policies within the union.<sup>180</sup>

Five unions operated in the meatpacking industry by 1934, with some associations having more influence in the packinghouses than others.<sup>181</sup> An influential group of organizers often referred to as the "militant minority" within three of these predominant labor bodies set the stage for organizing strategies and guidance of the rank-and-file within the stockyards. The first organization that encompassed the militant minority included the SLC. With a long history of organizing within the packinghouses, the SLC began to manage union campaigns again in 1933.<sup>182</sup> The organization made considerable progress building labor networks within the smaller packinghouses, and the union served a broad constituency of skilled laborers employed in meat cutting and trimming positions. The workers within the SLC had considerable authority amongst the stockyards as many were a part of the older butchering classes of Chicago. Members also took part in previous organizing efforts in the post-World War I period but rather than supporting

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<sup>180</sup> Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*, 43, 18.

<sup>181</sup> Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!", 69.

<sup>182</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 113.

segregation practices in the yards, many of these labor activists advocated for racial integration and class solidarity. Indeed, Horowitz argues that “The crumbling of community and business-sponsored support systems in the early years of the Great Depression weakened traditional loyalties within both black and ethnic communities and placed packing companies on the defensive.”

The second predominant labor organizing group within the packinghouses was the PHWIU, a union organization that affiliated with the CP’s Trade Union Unity League. The PHWIU had little initial success in the stockyards as the organization was comprised of about 500 members in the early years of the decade. Regardless of their limitations by number, labor activists in the PHWIU networked well with other labor associations throughout the meatpacking industry in the Midwest. This allowed for the incorporation of new organizing strategies within the Chicago stockyards. Leftists helped to perfect work-stoppages and other forms of direct action at the point of production that helped to build solidarity amongst workers and various packinghouse departments.<sup>183</sup> Many leaders within the CP provided “boundless energy and enthusiasm” to packinghouse organizing that encouraged worker resilience in union campaigns. Furthermore, the PHWIU included numerous black union activists whose passion and commitment to packinghouse labor organization and worker solidarity throughout the plants earned them successful union campaigns.

Lastly, the AMC began to campaign for unionism in the packinghouses during 1934 after several years of dormancy. The AMC had difficulty organizing in Chicago’s meatpacking industry due to a lack of stable organizing networks, and a poor reputation amongst workers of color. Although the Amalgamated did not overtly advocate for racial segregation during the

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<sup>183</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 113-17; Horowitz, “*Negro and White, Unite and Fight!*”, 70-71; Zieger, *The CIO*, 80; Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 14-15.

1930s, many black and Mexican workers interpreted the association's affiliation with the AFL as troublesome. To make matters worse, the AMC often refused to cooperate with either the SLC or the PHWIU which further alienated workers within the industry. That is not to say the AMC did not have an impact on the yards; with a large contingent of conservative butchers, the AMC retained a unique presence within the packinghouses. For example, the association even facilitated the organization of a short wild-cat strike that spontaneously emerged over wage cuts in 1933 that had the effect of stopping production in many stockyards.<sup>184</sup> Despite the union's coordinated efforts, the AMC never came to represent a majority of the work force.<sup>185</sup>

In 1936, these leading labor associations and a host of other rank-and-file labor activists began to discuss affiliation with the growing CIO movement. Inspired by the national union movement, these unionists formed the "Committee of Eighteen," that set the goal of affiliating with the CIO. After some political deliberation with the CIO field office, the Committee of Eighteen received approval to use the CIO name in organizing drives. By the fall of 1937, the organization had gained 9 charters within the Chicago packinghouses, and the CIO-affiliated locals encompassed 8,200 members.<sup>186</sup> Organizers and rank-and-file membership formed the PWOC in the same year.

In spite of substantial increases in membership, PWOC received little of the CIO's financial resources or organizing personnel.<sup>187</sup> This was partly due to significant setbacks in the national CIO campaign in the years of 1937 and 1938. Nonetheless many of the PWOC activists

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<sup>184</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 115.

<sup>185</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 70; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 121.

<sup>186</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 71; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 127.

<sup>187</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 125; Zieger, *The CIO*, 81.

in the stockyards continued on with organizing, and further networked with fellow CIO activists in the local SWOC to incorporate new organizing strategies and to provide breadth to the union campaigns.<sup>188</sup> Initial affiliation with the CIO meant little more than a relationship on paper, as Halpern notes, and local organizers and rank and file members active within the first four years of the decade largely made up the strength of the PWOC.

The successful efforts of these union activists and the larger mobilization of the rank-and-file expanded the union's influence into other working communities and social institutions. Two strategies helped to form the union's influence within the packinghouses. First, workers were able to socialize and build relationships with on-the-job direct action efforts in opposition to management practices. The focus on work grievances channeled discontent into productive actions of solidarity rather than stressing racial divisions amongst the work force that had persisted in early union drives within the industry. With the help of labor organizers and stewards, workers coordinated a series of wild-cat strikes, slow-downs, and stoppages at the point of production. As Halpern explains, "The frequent use of direct action tactics, a reliance on volunteer organizers, and a pronounced receptivity to radical influence characterized the style of unionism practiced by the PWOC."<sup>189</sup> The existence of union "chains" that acted as the first line of resistance against managements' indiscretions aided in the success of the union. Halpern explains that, "The chains served as [a] means to link day-to-day defensive activity of stewards with the periodic offensives of the union at the bargaining table, and provided a palpable connection between rank-and-file workers and the union apparatus."<sup>190</sup> The second place in

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<sup>188</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 127.

<sup>189</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 131.

<sup>190</sup> Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!", 210.

which workers built solidarity was within the surrounding communities of the stockyards. PWOC organizers and rank-and-file members discussed union organization and labor politics within their homes, with their church communities, political parties and in their social clubs. Rather than focusing solely on the Back of the Yards community, the PWOC membership touched base with each neighborhood in order to foster solidarity across race and ethnic commitments. Socialization between white and black workers within community spaces allowed for the workers to gain mutual trust and assurance in union commitments. Furthermore, the union received support from various business owners near the stockyards, and fellow workers in other industries throughout Chicago.

The first successful union drive achieved by the PWOC was in the Little Six<sup>191</sup> packinghouses of Chicago. Workers within these plants were far less in number, but many of them performed skilled butchering tasks and thus had considerable standing in the stockyards and surrounding communities. The practice of direct action within the Little Six plants allowed “local unions to perfect their shop-floor organization and to accustom their membership to disciplined, carefully orchestrated activity.”<sup>192</sup> The PWOC organizers gained signatures on union cards throughout the companies, and in 1937, the NLRB facilitated union elections in accordance with the NLRA. One by one, packinghouses within the Little Six began to unionize through direct action efforts and NLRB elections, and by 1938, five of the smaller plants had satisfactory contracts in place that defined workplace practices, and specified wage and benefit agreements between workers and the packers.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> The Little Six were a collection of smaller packinghouses comprising of Roberts and Oake, P.D. Brennan, Illinois Meat, Miller and Hart, Reliable Packing and Agar.

<sup>192</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 137.

<sup>193</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 135, 138.

The first of the Big Four packing companies targeted by PWOC in Chicago was Armour and Company. The company operated some of the largest packinghouses within the city, employing roughly 7,000 workers. The bounds of interracial unionism were tested within the plant, as 2,000 of these workers were black, with many laboring on the kill floors and within skilled cutting departments.<sup>194</sup> As Herbert March recalls:

Since World War I, a significant number of black workers had been in the industry. They had worked side by side with white workers on the killing and cutting floors. Instead of having workers who were just off a farm, you had an industrialized group of black workers who had all this experience of exploitation. And there was all sorts of discrimination practice against them.<sup>195</sup>

Much of the exploitation of blacks within Armour revolved around hiring practices and the unjust termination of black workers during seasonal layoffs. Black and white ethnic workers joined in solidarity through work stoppages and strikes to stop practices of discrimination.

Herbert March further recounts one of the long-standing grievances of black workers:

One of the first grievances we took up at Armour was a demand that the company remove from the time card of the worker who were black a little asterisk, a star. The state became an anathema as far as they were concerned, because what would happen with frequent turnover and layoffs in the meatpacking industry, a foreman would get instructions to lay off so many men. The foremen were all white, and they would look over the time cards, and they would pick out the cards where there was a star. Those were the fellows who got laid off. So one of the first demands was they remove stars from the cards – that everybody be treated equally- and we won that demand. They removed the star from the time cards of the black workers.<sup>196</sup>

Through secret community meetings, workers formed grievance lists, and such meetings acted as a socio-cultural space for the development of relationships amongst the workers outside of the workplace.

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<sup>194</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 73.

<sup>195</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 40-42.

<sup>196</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 42-44.

Armour and Company responded to labor organizing within the packinghouses by letting go several union and labor activists. The company then took steps to promote the company union as a respectable venue to discuss work grievances. Irrespective of the company's efforts, union activists continued to coordinate direct action efforts to renounce work speed-ups, and to advance a seniority system. The PWOC began to initiate an NLRB election shortly after these coordinated strikes. In the fall 1938, several NLRB rulings were made in support of the union and against the prevailing labor practices of Armour. The Board concluded that two previously fired workers had been unjustly terminated and that the company union was illegal under the conditions set in the NLRA. The NLRB held another election within the following month, and the work force overwhelmingly voted for representation by the PWOC.<sup>197</sup>

Even with the Board's rulings in these matters, Armour refused to reinstate the fired workers or recognize the union as the workers' collective bargaining agent. Unionists continued to facilitate work stoppages, and they increased their efforts to gain support for the fired workers. The tension within the yards even led to violence directed against union supporters and rank-and-file members that included the bombing of the PWOC facilities in September of 1938. Regardless of the violence and the complicated labor politics, "Job actions continued unabated, including a "holiday" [orchestrated] by 1,100 killing-floor workers" in solidarity with a local stockhandlers strike.<sup>198</sup> The PWOC also moved into other parts of the industry at this time, receiving the support of previously non-union trades and departments in the packinghouses.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 77.

<sup>198</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 77.

<sup>199</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 77.



The development of community organizations overall helped to tip the scales for unionization within the Armour plant. For example, in July of 1939, the PWOC organized a “dramatic Coliseum rally” in which representatives from “churches, businesses, community organizations, and the PWOC formed the Back of the Yards Council.”<sup>200</sup> The Back of the Yards Council added to the union drive in many ways. The Coliseum rally specifically allowed union organizers to connect with local clergy in the Catholic Church to defuse possible conflicts within the parishes about the community presence of the union. PWOC members encouraged priests to formally encourage their congregations to join the PWOC, as without this recognition, many packinghouse workers and families within the Back of the Yards would have abstained from supporting the union.<sup>201</sup> The Back of the Yards Council further discussed with local merchants that possible increases in wages for packinghouse workers would allow them the ability to shop more within their businesses.<sup>202</sup> For many within white ethnic communities, the position of PWOC members and organizers in political and social institutions impelled support for the union organization.

The PWOC’s support of the black community surrounding the stockyards played an important role in the 1939 Armour union drive. Previous discussions with the Catholic clergy in the Back of the Yards allowed PWOC members to network with black clergy on the South Side. Church services and related social functions allowed the union to discuss organizing matters within the congregations whose workers were by and large employed at the plant.<sup>203</sup> Pastors themselves viewed the PWOC’s organizing as a way to help alleviate the economic and social

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<sup>200</sup> Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”*, 78.

<sup>201</sup> Horowitz, *“Negro and White, Unite and Fight!”*, 78.

<sup>202</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 156.

<sup>203</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 159.

suffering of their congregations, and many were employed by the company as well. PWOC members also took an active role in campaign organizing for black Democratic Party members which helped to solidify the union amongst large political constituencies. Overall, the unions' networks and presence within the black community was more scattered than the Back of the Yards, but as Halpern summarizes, "The PWOC maintained a high profile in the Black Belt; its presence grew out of the daily social activities of the more than five thousand black packinghouse workers and their families who lived there."<sup>204</sup>

The PWOC played a large part in bringing the Back of the Yards, the black community and the South West Mexican community together. For instance, sports programs provided an essential outlet for white and black workers to socialize and build relationships outside of the workplace. Athletic programs such as bowling, basketball and baseball were organized by union members and supporters of the PWOC. In addition, the union created interracial youth groups for workers' children, and provided spaces for integrated play and learning. Halpern explains that, "The establishment of the "CIO Juniors" in 1939 offered unionists' children recreational and educational facilities well beyond the means of individual families while enabling black and white youngsters to interact with one another in an open setting."<sup>205</sup> Other events such as picnics and socials allowed for further chances to build solidarity amongst black and white workers and their families.<sup>206</sup>

Union organization continued within the Armour plant, and in December of 1939, a final NLRB vote was conducted. More than four thousand workers agreed to unionize the Armour

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<sup>204</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 158.

<sup>205</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 157.

<sup>206</sup> Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 157.

plant into Local 347. Armour would later concede to workers' demands, and sign a contract with the PWOC in January that institutionalized a grievance resolution process, established a thirty-two hour work week, and improved social benefits. The success of PWOC not only reflected the union's dynamic leadership, but also echoed the day-to-day actions of solidarity amongst the rank-and-file workers. With the successful organization of the union, Local 347 continued to move into various departments of Armour, organizing trades that had traditionally been non-union.<sup>207</sup>

Union success in the Armour plant in 1939 meant the first successful and uninterrupted coordination of resources between local union organizers and the CIO. The organization of other packinghouses within the Big Four, including Swift and Wilson, would soon follow within the coming years. Many of the same issues resurfaced in these packinghouses as a collection of workers remained loyal to the packers in exchange for social and economic security despite the incremental reduction of socio-economic benefits. Their strong presence within some plants made unionism difficult. For instance, Charles Hayes refers to his experience organizing against the company union at the Wilson plant:

They were in the process of trying to organize a union. In the main stockyards, Armour was already organized; Swift I believe was already organized at that time; and several of these so-called independent meatpackers were organized. Wilson was a more difficult one because they had what they called an independent union; it was nothing but a company union, that's what it was. The leadership was dominated by the company. The grievance procedure was almost nonexistent And they would fire you with little or no recourse. We in Wilson's did not have the kind of solidarity and unity that was prevalent in Armour because of the existence of the company union. That was one thing you had to always be conscious of.

We were trying to get rid of this union because it was controlled primarily by the company. But in order to do it, you had to get people signed up who wanted to be represented by the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee. I joined in with those who were working in this direction. Having this experience I had in Cairo [organizing in

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<sup>207</sup> Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight!"*, 78-79.

a union], it was just easy for me to be a part of this move, even though when I went there I had no intention of staying in the yards. Heck, the farthest thought in my mind was to take up the cudgels of a union again. All I could think of was becoming some kind of skilled worker. I had left Cairo and came here with the thought of working a while and then going to school, but the color of my skin and the fact that I had no money were barriers that stood in the way.<sup>208</sup>

Overall, the PWOC encouraged flexible yet solidarity-based organizing strategies within these companies. Leadership continued to highlight shop-floor grievances to focus workers' energies, and a large base of rank-and-file activists would help secure unionization. The majority of the meatpacking industry in Chicago, including all major plants and small facilities, were organized by the year 1943.<sup>209</sup> Later that year, meatpacking unions across the U.S. formed the international United Packinghouse Workers of America at a convention held in Chicago. To reflect the organization's commitment to interracial unionism and class solidarity, the international adopted the image of a black and white handshake to symbolize the UPWA.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Halpern and Horowitz, *Meatpackers*, 50-51.

<sup>209</sup> Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!", 82.

<sup>210</sup> Halpern, *Down in the Killing Floor*, 199.

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### Citizenship, the Packinghouse Workers, and a Politics of Becoming

Workers in the meatpacking industry of Chicago practiced two distinct group formations of citizenship from 1918-1940. Prior to the New Deal, structural conditions came together in order to shape subjects' understanding and performance of citizenship. In the post-World War I period, the structure of work within the industry informed citizenship formations represented in the actions of workers. With the introduction of assembly-line technology, management had the ability to speed-up work tasks. Throughout the packing industry, workers were encouraged to perform tasks quickly and efficiently. To be a competent worker, and thus citizen, meant possessing the ability to "keep up with the chain." Workers found it difficult to voice their concerns about the environment as a group. Rather, workers were encouraged to maintain cooperative relationships with management in order to discuss workplace issues and compensation. Foremen had considerable influence in this process, and in acts of termination. Those that expressed grievances in an undesirable manner were either fired by management, or moved to a different department with less favorable conditions. In other words, citizenship formations on-the-job stressed the individual relationships between workers and meatpacking companies.

Relationships between management and workers were further influenced by the practice of welfare capitalism within the packing industry. In the 1920s, the operators of industries in the U.S. expected citizens to work hard and remain flexible to the needs of industry. In return, companies provided substantial financial and social compensation. Welfare capitalism necessitated that workers abstain from unionization. To be sure, many employees found that welfare capitalism provided a certain level of socio-economic stability which made unionization impractical. In the meatpacking industry, for example, workers whom devised friendly

relationships with managers received greater compensation and experienced a higher level of job mobility and flexibility. A worker's capacity to move throughout managerial networks had a direct effect on their social and economic stability. In particular, the packinghouses provided many people of color with higher than normal wages, benefits and social status. While the conditions on-the-job and within the surrounding communities may have been less than ideal, work in the packinghouses allowed many black and Mexican workers considerable agency. Likewise, women workers within the stockyards were able to access resources at higher rates than those in other industries, and women were afforded a certain level of status by working within the packinghouses.

In contrast, some workers found that company paternalism made their employment inherently unstable. Those workers that took part in unskilled labor and that were of color, for example, had little authority to affect their labor practices, whereas those workers in semi-skilled and skilled positions could pressure management to concede to certain demands. In addition, white ethnic communities that opposed managerial pressures to perform work in a certain way had greater flexibility to oppose packers' labor models. In the case that management did not acknowledge workers' grievances, white communities organized unions depending on the context and the packinghouse. Although unionization was common within the industry at certain points such as in the early 1920s, racial segregation made class consensus on workplace issues difficult. The structure of work and structural labor practices aided in the alienation of communities of color and women. Black and Mexican workers often toiled in the worst jobs within the plants, and mental and physical harassment was common place. Women workers also experienced unsatisfactory work conditions. The tension between workers in the packinghouses further connected with the physical and socio-economic separation of the communities

surrounding the stockyards. White ethnic neighborhoods enforced a culture of intimidation and violence against those of color in the post-World War I era. As white ethnic workers were able to organize in solidarity with one another through the establishment of union associations, many workers of color and women were more inclined or forced to maintain individual relationships with managers in order to maintain their socio-economic well-being. Without workplace unity, any attempt at unionization or horizontal forms of organizing failed.

The activities of those in the yards prior to the New Deal indicate several trends in the subject formation of different groups of workers and the performance of citizenship. As mentioned, a culture of fragmentation amongst the workers prevented the group formations necessary to foster union organization. Many white ethnics believed that their inclusion in American culture necessitated the discrimination and hatred against those of color within union activities. Their citizen-subject formations at this time reflected prevailing ideologies and discursive constructions of race, and those ideologies were further reflected in the day-to-day activities of union organizers. For many ethnic communities, waged labor was a form of citizenship exclusive to white immigrants and natives; thus, white workers contested the inclusion of those of color within workplace activities. Indeed, work within the U.S. has provided citizens the ability to access social resources for a majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. White ethnic labor organizing did little to displace the worker-management relationships that many packinghouse workers relied on. Workers gravitated toward the packers as they distributed wages and social benefits at a higher rate than other industries and trades. Black workers in particular found that the welfare capitalist practices of the packers helped to sustain their families and community institutions affected by racial segregation in the Back of the Yards. Overall, the social and economic stability of workers necessitated the active commitment of the packers to

the workforce. Without the support of management, individual workers were not able to access social resources and citizenship. The racialized practices of the packers encouraged the exclusion of those of color and women from social citizenship. Without the support by management, individual workers were not able to access socio-economic resources, and certain versions of citizenship.

In all, the practice of racial segregation in the packinghouses and in the surrounding communities made group organization around class formations, and a politics of becoming on a broad scale, unviable. Citizenship-subject formations were influenced by hegemonic discourses of Americanism and whiteness. In addition, many workers trusted the packers' benevolence. The performance of citizenship by those in meatpacking was influenced by prevailing discourses of welfare capitalism. Most workers' ability to maintain one-on-one relationships with management provided the bulk of socio-economic support for those citizens in the stockyards.

Solidarity between workers in the packinghouses and within the larger social and political community during the New Deal reflected a reconstituted group citizen-subject formation. Earlier notions of citizenship had prioritized a particular understanding of whiteness, and workers' ability to engage with management at an individual level. Those changes in the citizen-subject formation of workers as a group were due to a number of factors. First, the context of the Great Depression encouraged many within Chicago to engage in alternative discourses of social class. While the state soon took action to address the concerns of the unemployed, albeit with mixed success, socio-political movements developed in a variety of communities, including the stockyards, in order to address the immediate needs of those within the city. Unemployed and leftist movements unique to Chicago helped to inform workers' sense of citizen-subject formations by introducing them to alternative economic and social discourses.



Another way in which unionists and rank-and-file workers participated in a politics of becoming was through the organization of local events around the stockyards, and the further development of social networks in the Back of the Yards, Southside black community, and Mexican community. The PWOC took an active role in discussing with the Catholic clergy the importance of union politics, and different churches provided broad-based support for unionism. The PWOC members themselves took an active role in such communities, and discussed union politics within their congregations. Unionists also discussed labor organizing in the black community. A large percentage of black unionists and rank-and-file workers were active in the PWOC, and advocated for the union within their religious congregations and within socio-economic institutions. Furthermore, social and class-based events organized by the PWOC helped to bridge the gap between workers of color and whites. Interracial social events organized around athletic games, dances and gatherings helped to encourage workers to participate in unionism together.

Above all, workers' citizen-subject formations changed through the organizational efforts of rank-and-file unionists whom focused workplace discontent into acts of solidarity on-the-job. Meatpacking workers participated in a variety of union organizing campaigns starting in the early 1930s. In particular, three unions formed the basis for organizing within the stockyards; the Stockyards Labor Council, Packinghouse Industrial Workers Union, and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters. The creation of the PWOC in 1937 under the CIO allowed for local unionists to participate in a politics of becoming on a larger scale. Through the use of work stoppages, production slow-downs, and strikes, meatpacking workers were able to unionize the packinghouses of Chicago. Workers perfected the use of union "chains" or highly coordinated rank-and-file responses to grievances that reflected collective forms of solidarity rather than

individual-management forms of citizenship. The development of solidarity amongst workers within the PWOC demonstrates a change in group performances of citizenship within this context.

## **Conclusion**

Citizenship and the processes that lead to the actualization of rights and membership in different communities will continue to be a controversial topic. As political and social theorists have shown, citizenship is a complex phenomenon, often integral to an individual's sense of well-being and placement within local, national and world communities. Additionally, human rights-based scholarship has made claims about why states should endow certain rights to individuals within political communities. Citizenship has been crucial in the creation of state policies and political programs, as the allocation of resources by the state to different communities has helped to define citizens versus non-citizens. Rights-based claims have come to encompass the theoretical foundation of citizenship rights, and therefore, civil and political rights have become central tenets of many Western democracies.

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars integrated theoretical arguments into citizenship theories that advocated for socio-economic equality by elaborating on citizenship rights. Scholars concentrated on the issue of 'the social' in citizenship, and engaged in questions of how the state could go about reducing inequality through political programs. The category of social rights was incorporated into the framework of human rights, and scholars argued that individuals have the right to economic and social stability regardless of their subject positions. The recognition of social rights led many to discuss the institutionalization of the welfare state; a model of statehood believed to reduce social and economic inequality. Analyses of the welfare state model were meant to inform our understanding of how states should or should not interject into the social realm. Some scholars even suggested that without social rights, access to civil and political protections did little to ensure an individual could exercise citizenship.

Critical analyses have called into question the legitimacy of social welfare programs. For example, scholars have detailed the ways in which political bodies and social institutions have systemically disenfranchised and even contributed to the subjugation of people of color, women, and communities not able to access state sanctioned forms of citizenship. Such critics have emphasized how dominant political and social theories have neglected to distinguish the power relationships within our everyday lives that shape access to social programs and citizenship for many people within the U.S. After all, citizenship has been a racialized and gendered project, in which the practice of exclusion has been systemic. That is not to say that social policy has not provided some resources for certain individuals, but rather that such policies have historically privileged certain communities over others.

Closely related to the critiques made by feminist and racial formations scholars is the recognition that citizenship has formed through the day-to-day practices of labor and social class. American citizenship in particular has required that Americans labor for wages in order to accrue social and economic benefits from the state. For instance, social relief policies passed during the New Deal required that citizens work in order to receive subsistence from the state. Some human rights scholars have also acknowledged that social class has interfered with the ability of individuals and groups to take part in citizenship because wealth is a direct reflection of an individual's ability to take part in political and civil processes.

The exclusion of people of color and women, along with certain working and laboring communities, in political institutions has put into question the legitimacy of citizenship. How might we recognize the discriminatory political practices of the state, while also seeing the transformative possibilities of citizenship? To answer this question, we should first understand why much of the social citizenship literature has focused largely on the creation of the welfare

state, and the extension of individual rights into the social realm. Social citizenship discourses have framed ideal notions of the citizen, largely informed by political and social activities at the level of the state. While this discourse has asked legitimate questions of citizenship, it also leaves important elements of the citizen-subject formation unquestioned.

Consider the movement of political discourses toward individualistic notions of citizenship in the last couple of decades. A large section of this scholarship focuses on the neoliberal subject, which is said to be an efficient and autonomous agent; a committed entrepreneur within the national community who possess a sense of market acumen, and whose rational choices endow them with citizenship. In this view, the state rewards the neoliberal citizen with the freedom of participation within the market economy in order to secure basic needs, rather than the state providing such resources through social policy intervention. The right of the individual to call upon the state for certain privileges or security has come into question by way of neoliberal scholarship. Rather, neoliberal citizenship requires the active commitment of individuals to the state, and that any rights provided to citizens by political institutions are entitlements only given to those that declare their allegiance to the national community in some fashion. Ideas regarding the neoliberal citizen have thus changed the expectations of the state, leading many to question the existence of 'the social' in modern liberal democracies.

Neoliberal scholars indeed continue to put the emphasis of citizenship on the individual, much like citizenship rights theorists. Scholars of neoliberalism have assumed that citizenship has a universal starting point for all of those within a specified community. The state and discursive constructs of citizenship have favored neoliberal citizen-subject formation. What the concept of neoliberal citizenship does not account for is the issue of social inequality. The theory of neoliberal citizenship, along with theories of citizenship rights, continues to individualize

notions of human existence at the expense of those who experience social and economic inequality. Because human rights as a discipline and model of governance has avoided or underemphasized the relationship between our social context and citizenship, issues of inequality often go unrecognized within such theoretical models.

Whereas questions of citizenship have been centered on the natural rights of the individual or neoliberal subject, a social take on citizenship suggests that subjectivities are embedded within their social circumstances and informed by the performance of citizenship. Natural rights have only served to universalize and disembodify the formation of citizenship which has led to the continued lack of concern over the material effects of social and institutional practices of inequality. To conceive of a transformative notion of citizenship, we must look for contextualized and embodied forms of citizen-subject formations that are visible in a variety of social and political situations. Such a strategy allows us to examine how citizenship manifests while also being critical of the day-to-day practices that aid in the formation of citizenship, and potential acts of inequality.

Additionally, the performance of subjectivity is transformative in that self-actualizations allows for the development of new forms of being. In other words, the processes of embodiment help to inform the subjects' sense of self. A number of social citizenship scholars have looked to social and cultural movements to ask further questions about how citizenship is embodied within minority communities. These scholars have concluded that those who participate in social movements for the recognition of group identity also engage in movements for the redistribution of resources, i.e. social citizenship. Group participation within these movements reflects many communities' need for social security and material resources. Through a politics of becoming, communities within social movements make claims for economic resources from the state and

other societal institutions. These movements allow us to see citizenship formations through a transformative lens, while also recognizing the limits of societal institutions due to systemic inequality.

In the central example explored in this thesis, a collection of issues came together to illicit workers' association and collective responses to larger political and economic trends in the Chicago meatpacking industry. Without the context of the Great Depression and the mistreatment of workers by the packers, the meatpacking workers may not have changed from the anti-union positions prevalent in the 1920s. As livelihoods diminished for the workers, unionization seemed like a viable option. More fundamental to union organization though, was the link between communities in and around the stockyards that otherwise would have stayed estranged without the New Deal socio-political context. The organization of the PWOC within the meatpacking industry showcases how being-in-common within social and political associations helped to transform previous relationships marked by racial, ethnic and gendered antagonisms. Labor organizers and the rank-and-file worked in concert to expand unionization that helped to inform new formations of citizenship.

Citizenship is a social process that informs our sense of being within our day-to-day lives as we navigate social and political institutions. While citizenship rights scholars have expanded on the welfare state to address the long-standing issues of social inequality within Western democracies, I suggest, along with others, that the exclusion of certain group identities points to the danger of those theories that universalize the social and further sidestep the practice of disparity. If we view citizenship as a process of subject formation, we can recognize the ways in which citizenship is an unequal process while also looking to those transformative moments in the performance of citizenship that help to alleviate social and economic inequality and injustice.

The politics of becoming acted out within social movements help to refashion common notions of citizenship through new performances of being-in-common. While the performance of citizenship changes, the politics of those within these movements have the effect of influencing their immediate socio-economic environment. Social citizenship then is not the process by which states provide certain rights to the individual. Citizenship is a social process that is performed within those communities engaged in political activities, and citizenship is embodied in the actions of those that look to change their self and material worlds.



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