Introduction

Something of Slavery Still Remains

In the fall of 1887, the Knights of Labor, the largest organization of workers in nineteenth-century America, attempted to organize sugar cane workers in and around the town of Thibodaux, Louisiana. The mostly black plantation workers were paid next to nothing and labored long hours in brutal conditions. Worse yet, many worked for bosses that just a few decades earlier had been their slave masters. Although they now had to make contracts with their former slaves, these masters-cum-bosses were still accustomed to exercising unquestioned control over their labor force.

The labor association suddenly challenging the plantation-owners' authority was first organized in 1869 as "The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor" by a small group of Philadelphia garment workers. The Knights' Preamble and Declaration of Principles said they had come together "for the purpose of organizing and directing the power of the industrial masses."[1] The phrase "industrial masses" was meant to communicate a certain egalitarian idea. The Knights believed that all workers, skilled and unskilled, white and black, had the right to defend their interests collectively and, as such, they had a common interest in belonging to a single labor organization. In fact, the Knights were the first national labor association ever to organize black workers together with whites on a mass basis – an effort not meaningfully duplicated in the United States for nearly a century.[2] They aspired to draw disparate groups of workers together under the idea that everyone should have not just higher wages, shorter hours, or better conditions, but full economic

[1] Terence V. Powderly, ed., "Knights of Labor Platform – Preamble and Declaration of Principles," in *Labor: Its Rights and Wrongs* (Washington, DC: The Labor Publishing Company, 1886), 30.

[2] Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 150–72; Claudia Miner, "The 1886 Convention of the Knights of Labor," *Phylon* 44, no. 2 (1983), 147–59; Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 46–51.

independence. A life spent working should not be a life spent working under someone else's will.

In pursuit of their emancipatory project, they had established assemblies of Knights everywhere from the male-dominated mines of rural Pennsylvania to the mostly female garment factories of New York to the railroads of Denver. The Knights' expansion into the American South began in 1886 at their general assembly meeting in Richmond, Virginia. In a conspicuous show of racial solidarity, a black Knight named Frank Ferrell took the stage to introduce the Knights' leader, Terence V. Powderly, before Powderly's opening address. In defense of his controversial decision to have a black Knight introduce him, Powderly wrote "in the field of labor and American citizenship we recognize no line of race, creed, politics or color."[3] After the assembly, a number of Knights met with local contacts in Southern states such as South Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana to organize workers and set up local assemblies.

Their plan in southern Louisiana was to organize the sugar workers and to present plantation owners with a choice: raise wages or face a crop-threatening strike. After the summer growing season, sugar had to be cut relatively quickly or be lost to frost, so a threat to withhold labor carried real weight. The Knights' organizing drive in Louisiana quickly turned into one of the boldest, and most catastrophic, challenges to the plantocracy since the end of Reconstruction ten years earlier.[4]

Initial letters from local organizers in the sugar parishes showed little awareness of the looming danger. From late August to early November 1887, *The Journal of United Labor*, the official paper of the Knights of Labor, received mostly positive updates from organizers in Louisiana. A message dated August 29, 1887 reports "three new Local Assemblies, located at Thebodeaux, Chacahoula and Abbeville." After mentioning employer threats to replace potential strikers with convict laborers, the Louisiana Knight concludes with the assurance that "an amicable settlement, satisfactory to both sides, can be arranged."[5] A week later, a letter from Terrebonne, Louisiana mentions a success at organizing, despite "employers on plantations" having "taken all possible means to harm the Order." The reporting Knight also observes that employees receive their mere 50 cents per day in "pasteboard tickets" redeemable only at over-priced local plantation stores. Widely used throughout the United States at the time, these tickets or "scrip" had the sole purpose of keeping workers bound to a specific employer. Small wonder a Knight from Terrebonne said their effect was to "make you a slave" and reported that they had become an

[3] Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor 1859–1889* (Columbus, OH: Excelsior Publishing House, 1889), 659.

[4] Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 61–88.

[5] "Morgan City, LA., Aug. 29, 1887," *The Journal of United Labor* VIII, no. 11 (September 17, 1887), 2491. *The Journal of United Labor*, hereafter *JUL*.

issue in negotiations with planters.[6] In a September 21 message, an organizer in another sugar town wrote that, despite having to keep their membership in the Knights a secret, the local workers are "doing splendidly." A similar report from a neighboring parish on October 3 stated "we are progressing rapidly down here."[7]

Knights had good reason for their initial optimism. By late 1887, one district assembly in the bayou region claimed 5,000 black members, more than forty local assemblies were spread across New Orleans and planter country, and the membership included some of the most influential black leaders from the heady days of Reconstruction.[8] A spirit of self-assertion not seen for more than a decade blew through the cane fields. If planters would not raise wages and pay in currency rather than pasteboard tickets, then the Knights were ready to call a strike for November 1. The planters refused, threatening to use convict labor to replace ordinary workers. Uncowed, thousands of workers struck.[9]

Soon after, reports that found their way to the *Journal*'s main office up north in Philadelphia had turned noticeably darker. On November 17, the *Journal* printed a letter from Franklin, Louisiana saying, "we are having some excitement … on account of a strike. The planters and the Governor, with the militia, are endeavoring to crush the Order out of existence." Despite these ominous signs, the author still hoped that "by January 1 we will be in good trim to lease (on the co-operative plan) a good plantation."[10] In the face of military threats, the Knights continued to believe not only that they could raise wages but, more remarkably, that they could organize black workers to own and manage a plantation for themselves. This was no mere pipe dream. Just 400 miles away, near Birmingham, Alabama, Knights had founded two cooperative settlements. Named "Powderly" and "Trevellick" after leading Knights, these towns were to serve as organizing hubs and, by the time of the sugar strike, included a cooperative cigar works and iron foundry.[11] We shall return shortly to the wider significance of this "co-operative plan."

On November 26, the *Journal* printed a letter describing the Knights' defiance of the "many companies of State militia, with their Gattling [sic] guns," who were attempting to force the striking workers back to the fields. Little did

[6] "Terrebonne, LA., Sept. 5, 1887," *JUL* VIII, no. 12 (September 26, 1887), 2496.
[7] "Little Cailliou, LA., Oct 3, 1887," *JUL* VIII, no. 15 (October 15, 1887), 2508; "Hocma, LA., Sept. 21, 1887," *JUL* VIII, no. 13 (October 1, 1887), 2500.
[8] Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 61–93.
[9] According to Scott, the oft-repeated number of 10,000 striking workers is exaggerated but it is still very likely the numbers were in the thousands. Ibid., 81.
[10] "Franklin, LA.," *JUL* VIII, no. 20 (November 17, 1887), 2528.
[11] Clare Dahlberg Horner, *Producers' Co-Operatives in the United States, 1865–1890* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 40–1; Steven Leikin, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 73.

the *Journal*'s editors know that by the time they had printed that letter the Louisiana state militia had broken the strike and corralled thousands of strikers into the town of Thibodaux, where a state district judge promptly placed them all under martial law. State militia then withdrew, intentionally leaving the town to a group of white citizen-vigilantes called the "Peace and Order Committee," who happened to have been organized by the same judge that declared martial law. Upon meeting resistance from the penned in strikers, the white vigilantes unleashed a three-day torrent of killing, from November 21 to November 23, on the unarmed cane-workers and their families. "No credible official count of the victims of the Thibodaux massacre was ever made," writes one historian, but "bodies continued to turn up in shallow graves outside of town for weeks to come."[12] Precise body counts were beside the point. The question of who ruled town and country, plantation and courthouse, had been answered. As a mother of two white vigilantes put it, "I think this will settle the question of who is to rule[,] the nigger or the white man? For the next 50 years …"[13] A few months later, the Knights continued to organize in parts of Louisiana and elsewhere in the South, but the slaughter at Thibodaux put strict limits on the black worker's struggle for economic independence and equal rights in the South. Farming a plantation "on the co-operative plan" was not even a dream deferred; it was easy to forget it had ever been a possible world the cane cutters might live in. The Knights, meanwhile, were soon reduced to an historical footnote.

The officially sanctioned mob violence at Thibodaux was one of many over the course of Southern history. In each case, a challenge to race-based class rule was met with vigilante justice in the name of white supremacy. In this case, however, it is worth noting that the Knights articulated their challenge in a specific, not well-remembered, language of freedom. From the abolition of slavery to the end of Reconstruction, many freed slaves sought more than legal recognition as equal citizens. They felt their liberation included the right not to have a master at all. They refused to work for former masters, even when offered a formal labor contract and wages.[14] Instead, when possible, they seized or settled land set aside for them and worked it individually or in joint "labor companies."[15] Former slaves asserted their independence at all levels by organizing their own militias to protect their rights, by working their own property, by voting as they wished, and by holding local and national office. This

[12] Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 85.
[13] Quoted in ibid. 87.
[14] For accounts of the fraught attempt to impose the wage-labor form on freed slaves see Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 79–90; Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–137.
[15] Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 36; Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 79–90.

radical moment of Reconstruction was quickly suppressed and the collapse of Reconstruction in 1877 spelled the end of any but the narrowest interpretation of what emancipation would mean.[16]

When the Knights of Labor swept into Louisiana a decade later, they not only revived old hopes about self-organization and economic independence. They also integrated these regional aspirations of former slaves into a recast national ideology of republican freedom. The aforementioned hopeful parenthesis – "by January 1 we will be in good trim to lease (*on the co-operative plan*) a good plantation" – speaks to this ideological shift. No doubt black laborers and local leaders heard echoes of the short-lived Reconstruction-era "labor companies" and black militias in this new language of self-directed "co-operative plans." Their enemies certainly did. The *Thibodaux Sentinel*, a racist local paper hostile to the Knights' organizing efforts, warned "against black self-organization by trying to remind whites and blacks of what happened a generation earlier, in the days of black militias, and white vigilantism" and evoked "the old demons of violence and arson by 'black banditti.'"[17] But former slaves were now also modern workers, and the Knights trumpeted the same emancipatory language throughout the nation, heralding "co-operation" as a solution to the problems facing wage-laborers everywhere. If their message carried special historical resonances in the South, the Knights added a new universalizing and solidaristic note.

This program of liberation through cooperative self-organization, articulated in the transracial language of making all workers into their own employers, scared northern industrialists just as much as Southern planters. In fact, if we see the Thibodaux massacre as just a Southern race story, then we run the risk of unintentionally and retrospectively ceding too much to the plantocracy and its attempts to control labor relations by transforming economic conflicts into questions of racial superiority. After all, wherever the Knights went and wherever their message of cooperation and independence took hold, they were met with violence not all that different from that of Southern vigilantes. Throughout the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, the Knights faced private violence from employers and their hired guns, most notoriously the Pinkertons. The Pinkertons operated in legal grey zones, sometimes with outright legal sanction from the courts, and often in cooperation with National Guards or even Federal troops. In fact, on occasion it was the public violence of the state that was responsible for spectacular acts of legally sanctioned murder and coercion.[18] Labor reformers labeled

[16] Foner, *Nothing but Freedom*, 90–110. On the black militias in Louisiana, see Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 50–58.

[17] Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 80.

[18] Philip Taft and Philip Ross, "American Labor Violence: Its Causes, Character, and Outcome," in *The History of Violence in America: A Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence*, ed. Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, 1969; William Forbath,

this unholy alliance of the state with the "Pinkerton Armed Force," its spies and "provocative agents," as a kind of "Bonapartism in America," threatening to turn "the free and independent Republic of the United States of America" into the "worm-eaten Empire of Napoleon the Third."[19] Just as in Thibodaux, the lines between vigilante violence and legal coercion sometimes blurred into indistinction. What, then, was the idea of freedom that triggered such extreme responses?

The Knights of Labor represented the culmination of a radical, labor republican tradition. Their starting premise was that "there is an inevitable and irresistible conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government."[20] Wage-labor was considered a form of dependent labor, different from chattel slavery, but still based on relations of mastery and subjection. Dependent labor was inconsistent with the economic independence that every republican citizen deserved. That is why, in the name of republican liberty, these Knights sought "to abolish as rapidly as possible, the wage system, substituting co-operation therefore."[21] Here was the source of their "co-operative plan," which they found as applicable to the cane fields of Louisiana as to the shoe factories of Massachusetts.[22] The Knights wrote the cooperative program into their official constitution, the Declaration of Principles of the Knights of Labor, and, at their peak, organized thousands of cooperatives across the country.[23] The cooperative ideal threatened Southern planters, Northern industrialists and Western railroad owners alike because it struck at the dominant industrial relations between employer and employee. Affording all workers shared ownership and management of an enterprise, whether a sugar plantation, newspaper press, or garment factory, was – according to the Knights – the only way to secure to everyone their social and economic independence. The abolition of slavery two decades earlier was but the first step in a broader project of eliminating all relations of mastery and subjection in economic life. Although these ideas had been around well before the Civil War, it was only the abolition of chattel slavery and the rise of industrial capitalism that allowed the republican critique of wage-labor to come forward as a unifying, national cause. As

Law and the Shaping of the American Labor Movement (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1971); Barton C. Hacker, "The United States Army as a National Police Force: the Federal Policing of Labor Disputes, 1877–1898," *Military Affairs* 33, no. 1 (April 1969), 1–11.

[19] John Swinton, "Bonapartism in America," *John Swinton's Paper* II, no. 100 (September 6, 1885). Hereafter *John Swinton's Paper* cited as *JSP*.

[20] George E. McNeill, *The Labor Movement: The Problem of to-Day* (New York: The M. W. Hazen Co., 1892), 459.

[21] S. M. Jelley, *The Voice of Labor* (Chicago: A. B. Gehman & Co., 1887), 203.

[22] On the cooperatives in Stoneham, MA, see Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 89–115.

[23] For the constitution, see Powderly, "Knights of Labor Platform – Declaration of Principles of the Knights of Labor," 30–3. Best estimates are that the Knights established approximately 500 producer cooperatives and thousands of consumer cooperatives. Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, 2.

Ira Steward, a child of abolitionists and prominent post-war labor republican, wrote in 1873, "something of slavery still remains … something of freedom is yet to come."[24]

Labor and Republican Liberty

Although not nearly the topic of scholarly interest they once were, labor historians have long known about the Knights of Labor and their predecessors. These "labor republicans" are usually, and fairly, seen as something of a hopeful or utopian moment in the growth of an otherwise more conservative American labor movement.[25] Their meteoric rise was only outpaced by their collapse. By the time of the Thibodaux massacre, the Knights were beginning their rapid decline. The more enduring, if much less radical, American Federation of Labor overtook them by the end of the century. But the Knights were not just a passing phase in American working-class formation. Their rise and fall is not only of importance to scholars of American political and labor history. The Knights were also a local, American chapter in the wider development of what has come to be known as republican political thought.[26]

The aim of this book is to interpret labor republicans as a substantial contribution to this republican tradition. Although labor historians have documented the way the language of republican liberty and civic virtue articulated class grievances in a peculiarly American vernacular, historians of political thought have failed to register the significance of this labor scholarship, let alone of the nineteenth-century voices themselves. Perhaps that is because historians of political thought assume there is nothing here but one of those peculiarities

[24] Ira Steward, "Poverty," in *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor*, ed. Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, vol. 173 (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1873), 412.

[25] The major investigations into the Knights are mostly from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Norman Ware, *The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860–1895: A Study in Democracy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1929); Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil*; Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865–1900* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961); Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*; Susan Levine, *Labor's True Woman: Carpet Weavers, Industrialization, and Labor Reform in the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*; David Montgomery, "Labor and the Republic in Industrial America: 1860–1920," *Le Mouvement Social* 111, no. Georges Haupt parmi nous (1980), 201–15; Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Richard Oestreicher, "Socialism and the Knights of Labor in Detroit, 1877–1886," *Labor History* 22, no. 1 (1981), 5–30.

[26] The literature is massive and will be discussed later. Leading statements are Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

of American history. If so, then they make a serious mistake. Those supposedly exceptional features of American history – race and slavery, immigration and the frontier, industrialization without a major socialist party – are better seen as elements of historical experience that sharpened labor reformers' focus on what republican liberty could mean in a modern economy. Precisely because Americans fought such a vigorous and intellectually productive battle over the relationship between slavery and freedom, they also uncovered long-standing paradoxes as well as conceptual resources in the republican tradition itself. These peculiarities of American history gave them a special sensitivity to the problem of slave labor, and through that, to the connection between republican liberty and labor relations generally. The claim that wage-labor was inconsistent with republican government reflected something more than a judgment about the Deep South or the United States. It also showed the usefulness of republican language when speaking to new, intercontinental experiences of domination in the modern economy as a whole. That is likely one reason why the Knights were able to organize assemblies not just in the United States but also in Canada, Belgium, England, France, and New Zealand. A political tradition that, in the hands of originating figures such as Cicero, once sanctioned deference, inequality, and slavery,[27] had now become a serious threat to existing forms of domination and inequality. How did this happen? What were the ideological transformations that allowed for such an inversion of what had once been an aristocratic tradition?

Republican Political Thought

The answers to those questions require us to revise our understanding of the republican tradition. However, I should note that, although this book is a contribution to scholarship on republican political thought, it did not begin that way. Originally, I conceived it as a critique of that scholarship from a broadly speaking Marxist standpoint. I noticed that the major works of republican political philosophy and legal theory had little distinctive to say about the social question in general, and about modern forms of labor domination in particular.[28] The landmark works on the history of republican thought had an

[27] On these topics in Cicero, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery From Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40–43; Andrew Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 220–32; Neal Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57–59. See the discussion in Chapter 1.

[28] These were, at the time, Pettit's *Republicanism*, Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent*, and Dagger's *Civic Virtues*, as well as a few essays on economic regulation and basic income. For example, Philip Pettit, "Freedom in the Market," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2006), 131–49; Philip Pettit, "A Republican Right to Basic Income?," *Basic Income Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2007), 1–8; Nien-hê Hsieh, "Rawlsian Justice and Workplace Republicanism," *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 1 (2005), 115–42; Richard Dagger, "Neo-Republicanism

analogous defect. They limited themselves to the early modern period, roughly the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, which spans the recovery of classical republicanism by the Italian humanists and the transmission of their ideas to the British commonwealthsmen and American rebels.[29] Although these works showed in different ways that some classical idea of freedom was revived so as to criticize various forms of 'political slavery,' such as absolute monarchy and colonial government, scholars fell well short of discussing the history of reflection on actual slavery, let alone the importance of the nineteenth-century labor question. The prevailing historical scholarship gave the strong impression that nothing conceptually meaningful happened in the republican tradition after the American Revolution.

Originally, I thought these scholarly limitations reflected real limitations. It appeared that the republican tradition simply lacked the theoretical resources to comprehend, let alone provide a coherent response to, the modern forms of economic domination and the corresponding demands for freedom. In particular, it seemed that the republican tradition remained too strongly wedded to two institutions, private property and slavery, to generate a significant, modern response to industrial capitalism. The republican defense of the rights of property against the propertyless, even when stretched to include small property-owners seeking protection against speculators and rentiers, seemed incapable of addressing the needs of poor workers, let alone the wider questions of how to organize production and consumption on an egalitarian basis. As for slavery,

and the Civic Economy," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 5, no. 2 (June 1, 2006), 151–73; Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). On legal republicanism, see the symposium in the 1988 Yale Law Review, especially Sunstein's and Michelman's essays. Cass Sunstein, "Beyond the Republican Revival," *Yale Law Journal* 97, no. 8 (July 1988), 1539–90; Frank I. Michelman, "Law's Republic," *Yale Law Journal* 97, no. 8 (July 1988), 1493–537. Also Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991); Morton J. Horwitz, "Republicanism and Liberalism in American Constitutional Thought," *William & Mary Law Review* 29 (1987), 57–74. Only William Forbath and James Pope gave labor republicanism any sustained attention in their important essays. William Forbath, "Ambiguities of Free Labor: Labor and the Law in the Gilded Age" *Wis. L. Rev.* (1985), 767; James Gray Pope, "Labor's Constitution of Freedom," *Yale Law Journal* 106, no. 4 (January 1997), 941–1031.

[29] Quentin Skinner, "Machiavelli's Discorsi and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock Maurizio Viroli Quentin Skinner, vol. 120 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121–41; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); J. G. A. Pocock, "Review: Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1972), 119–34; Maurizio Viroli, *Republicanism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002); Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*; Mark Jurdjevic, "Virtue, Commerce, and the Enduring Florentine Republican Moment: Reintegrating Italy Into the Atlantic Republican Debate" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 4 (2001), 721–43; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2004); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Pettit, *Republicanism*; Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 17–50.

even if modern republicanism was not inescapably tied to the institution itself, its conceptual apparatus was too linked to the peculiarity of that experience to make sense of the market. Slavery, as an experience of personal subjection to a specific master, was rather different from the forms of domination a person might experience in the anonymous labor market. The shift to the modern labor market, the rise of an industrial proletariat, and the transformation of property composed elements of a historical reality that could not fit the republican vocabulary. That, I thought, was why republicanism had no *intellectual* history beyond the eighteenth century, even if it had a political and labor history. There was good reason why Marxism eclipsed the republican demand for liberty, both in theory and practice. Or so it seemed.

However, episodes such as the Thibodaux massacres, and figures such as Ira Steward, gave me pause. After deeper investigation, it became clear to me that those working in political philosophy and the history of political thought had simply overlooked the dynamism of the very tradition they sought to recover. By ending their narrative with the American Revolution, they let the curtain fall on the drama of modern republicanism just as a new set of actors took the stage and as another act was about to begin. The nineteenth century was a period of intense self-reflection for the republican tradition because of internal class challenges to some of its deepest assumptions. As artisans and wage-laborers seized the language of republican liberty and civic virtue, they brought to the fore a series of paradoxes and puzzles. They also exploited and developed conceptual possibilities that had, until then, remained dormant or marginal to the republican tradition's primary concerns. These labor republicans developed the conceptual material both for criticizing "wage-slavery" and for generating a demand for a cooperative commonwealth. Although not quite the same language as Marx, this was clearly no stale mode of thought incapable of responding to the times. Any reckoning with the republican tradition would first have to reconstruct the political ideas of these nineteenth-century labor republicans and give them their full place not just in American history, but in modern political thought.

Rehabilitation and Renewal

Reconstructing labor republicanism as a form of political theory is not just a matter of filling gaps in our historical knowledge. Instead, it goes to the heart of the republican revival's central aspiration: the rehabilitation of a lost language of freedom. Quentin Skinner, one of the leading figures in this scholarly movement, argues that, "we have inherited two rival and incommensurable theories of negative liberty."[30] The dominant, liberal theory defines freedom as "non-interference." The lost, republican theory defines freedom as

[30] Quentin Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117, no. 237 (2002), 262.