

Reasoning Americans: The lost counterpublic of American Socialists and their national newspaper

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ABSTRACT

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and their national newspaper

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This thesis presents original research from the primary text of the *Appeal to Reason* newspaper (1895-1922) as evidence of the nature of the American Socialist counterpublic in the decade prior to the First World War. The text shows that turn-of-the-century American Socialists prioritized reacting and appealing to the mainstream public in their discourses, limiting their ability to build an independent worldview. However, the design and mode of production of the *Appeal to Reason* shows that while the paper has been criticized for its conventionally hierarchical structure, it had several features that made it possible for members of the American Socialist counterpublic to communicate in a way that was fundamentally separate from the dominant public sphere. The conclusion is that the American Socialist counterpublic did for a time constitute an alternative space of political action, although with significant limitations.

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Introduction

This work explores the public of American Socialists of the early twentieth century through a neglected source: a popular socialist newspaper called the *Appeal to Reason*. A public is more than a vaguely defined source of group opinion. It is an abstract, but powerful field of communication and identity made up of texts, spaces and organizations. The American Socialists were not just a public, but a counterpublic that was defined by its exclusion from mainstream discourse. Through this framework and the rich textual source of the *Appeal to Reason*, the following chapters will investigate what role the American Socialist public and its media played in the self-understanding, expression, and worldview of its members. This will also shed light on what the *Appeal* in particular can add to our understanding of socialist history in the United States.

The *Appeal to Reason*, published out of Kansas from 1895 to 1922, was the largest and most famous American pre-war radical paper, and its popularity was notable. At its height in 1913, its paid circulation reached 760,000, and special editions of several million copies were sometimes printed (England 51). By comparison, one hundred years later, the circulation of the *New York Times* is about 1,500,000 per day (O'Shea). The beginnings of the *Appeal* were coloured by its publisher's previous disastrous experience attempting to establish a cooperatively owned newspaper, the *Coming Nation*, which was printed from a cooperative colony (Shore, *Talkin' Socialism* 75). This experience dissuaded the publisher, J.A. Wayland, from ever again giving up sole ownership of his newspaper (Shore, *Talkin' Socialism* 90-93). The *Appeal's* early years were difficult, but overall it steadily gained subscribers, and eventually hired

professional editors and writers to supplement the material that Wayland had once produced almost alone (Shore, "Selling Socialism" 164-165). As its influence grew, the *Appeal* angered powerful figures including President Theodore Roosevelt, and was subject to a number of legal challenges, especially on its right to use the special postal rates reserved for newspapers (England 82, 107). In the years before World War I, however, these attacks and the resulting publicity only increased the circulation of the paper and caused it to be more widely read and supported, even when its editor, Fred D. Warren, was sentenced to six months hard labour for mailing "defamatory and threatening" matter (England 60, 62, 66). The *Appeal's* relationship with the Socialist Party was always at arms length, although its editorial policy was to strongly encourage readers to vote for the party and it acted as "the most visible link between socialists and their movement" (Shore, *Talkin' Socialism* 80-82, Shore, "The Walkout" 44). In 1912 Wayland committed suicide, after which one of his sons took over the business (England 186). This transition coincided roughly with the increasing repression of Socialists and other leftists after the start of World War I. Although the *Appeal* survived this period by several years, its influence was much diminished by the change in leadership and political climate.

Circumstances in the United States before the First World War encouraged the development of radical working-class movements. At the end of the Civil War the United States was still an agricultural economy, but by 1900 most people lived in cities, and the economy had quickly become industrialized (Graham ix-x). Pay and working conditions declined between the early and late 1800s, and slums appeared and grew in the cities as the real wages of most of the urban working-class declined below

subsistence levels (Dulles and Dubofsky 73-75). At the same time, the state began to see its role as that of a protector of corporate interests, and by 1890 the top one percent of the population owned more wealth than the other ninety-nine percent (Graham x).

The *Appeal to Reason* officially aligned itself with the Socialist Party and an electoral solution to working-class issues, but the American Socialist public it was part of cannot be understood without reference to the contemporary labour movement and its militant tendencies. The years between 1900 and the First World War are known as the “progressive” era, when government regulation at the state and federal level first began to be used to curb some of the worst features of industrial capitalism in the United States, and therefore some of the most militant discontent against it (Dulles and Dubofsky 166-167). Less than 10 percent of workers were unionized during this period, and most were affiliated with the moderate American Federation of Labor, which encouraged conciliation with employers (Dulles and Dubofsky 169-170). In the early years of the twentieth century, unions seemed to be gaining mainstream legitimacy, and in many cases agreements were reached with employers that improved pay and conditions (Dulles and Dubofsky 168-169). Employers wanted to avoid repeating the destructive class-based armed conflict and riots of the 1890s to protect their profits, and many union leaders also saw those conflicts as ultimately detrimental (Dulles and Dubofsky 168). Some unions, especially of mining and textile workers, continued a militant approach, and by 1904, large business owners and their allies in the government began to orchestrate a backlash against union organizing that was visible in both the violence of the Ludlow Massacre of miner’s families, and judicial sanctions against union activities (Dulles and Dubofsky 177-179). By 1910, union membership, which

had been consistently low for the previous decade, began to increase rapidly (Dulles and Dubofsky 186-187). Given the memory of the violence and disruption of the 1890s, combined with the failure of working alliances with employers and tentative legal reforms, it is unsurprising that increasing numbers of Americans believed both that their current representatives were working against their interests, and that change was best accomplished through electoral politics.

Closely related to, but not coinciding perfectly with the labour movement, was the Socialist Party. At its height the Party, founded in 1901, received 6 percent of the popular vote in the 1912 presidential election and had 117,984 official members (Critchlow 1). Socialist representatives were elected in a number of local governments; Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Marion; Indiana, Flint, Michigan; Dayton, Ohio; and a region of Southern Illinois (Critchlow 8). Although early American Socialists are best remembered as coming from Eastern cities and recent immigrant backgrounds, membership of the party was in fact quite diverse, encompassing recent immigrants from a variety of countries as well as older settlers, and inhabitants of big cities as well as small towns and rural areas (Critchlow 5). The Socialist Party was created partly from the remains of the Populist Party, and for this and other reasons had a solid basis of support among farmers as well as industrial workers (Critchlow 4). These “agricultural” socialists came especially from “Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and the Great Plains states,” where “socialism took on a revival-like spirit” (Critchlow 6).

The rise of the radical press in the United States predated the rise of the Socialist Party and the widely-cited 1900-1920 “Golden Age” of socialism in America by ten or twenty years (Gutman 82). Bekken argues that the radical press was a “cultural

institution” to “create and sustain a specifically working-class culture” (“No Weapon” 105, 104). It is likely that many subscribers were not officially part of any political group or party, but read radical papers because they did not see their reality reflected in the mainstream papers of the day. Although the *Appeal to Reason* was published only in English, many radical papers were foreign-language, reflecting the large proportion of immigrants in the working class. Shore, Fones-Wolf, and Danky situate their volume on the German-American radical press “from 1870 to 1910, when the social democratic press was at its height” (2). Over 120 German-language radical publications were started during this era, (Shore *et al.* 4). Bekken cites a 1925 study of the Labor Research Department of the Rand School of Social Science showing that of fifteen daily worker’s newspapers found by the study, only six were in English (107). The *Appeal*, therefore, existed as part of a vibrant and diverse public made up of members of the Socialist Party, overlapping elements of the labour movement, readers of radical publications and participants in other radical working-class cultural activities.

The methodology of this work is based on a close reading and interpretive analysis of the contents of the *Appeal to Reason* between January 1, 1909 and January 1, 1912, and a comparison of this material with the *New York Times* of the same period. As such the research mainly relies on primary-source documents, with context and background material from secondary sources (although not many specifically about the *Appeal* exist). The first step was to become familiar with the material over a larger time period through reading the *Appeal* on microfilm, as well as the collected articles in Graham’s “*Yours for the Revolution*”: *The Appeal to Reason, 1895-1922* (1990). The period from 1909 to 1912 was chosen because this was the height of the circulation and

influence of the *Appeal*, and of the success of the Socialist party. During this period, most of the *Appeal's* most widely-read stories were published, and the paper was the target of increasing hostile attention from the federal government. This was a strain on the paper but also earned it unprecedented publicity, as its original reporting was drawing grudging credibility from the mainstream press. After having determined the time-span to be covered, copies of one issue for every three weeks were printed on 13x19" paper, close to the original publication size of the newspaper. The resulting fifty-two copies were read for discourse, news narratives, and information about the *Appeal's* business practices and production. For the examination of discourses and stories in Chapter Two, a number of possibilities were narrowed down to the two most prominent and illustrative discourses and news narratives. In each case, material from the *New York Times* provides an example of how a mainstream paper was covering the same material at the same time. For the discussion of distribution of and business structure in Chapter Three, advertisements and messages to readers in the newspaper itself were used, as well as secondary sources that draw on the *Appeal's* archives. Again, the practices of the *New York Times* are contrasted with these findings.

The *Appeal to Reason* is arresting. Reading articles in the paper is a strange experience, more like encountering an elaborate historical fiction than an artifact of the recognizable past. The *Appeal's* rhetoric of class conflict, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism is expressed in the familiar and distinctively florid style of turn-of-the-century American prose. The optimism, hustle, faith in technology and the future in the *Appeal* is familiar, but the actual ideas expressed in this language are unexpected. It is both quintessentially American and unmistakably radical. This sense of encountering a

new world is more than a novelty: it indicates the existence of the public that is often overlooked in both academic and non-academic histories of American politics and journalism.

It is not enough, however, to find an interesting anomaly and to attempt to add or re-insert it back into established histories. As Judy Greenway writes of feminist history, “inclusive” or “additive” approaches to overlooked groups in history can be helpful, but miss an opportunity to use these absences to fundamentally re-examine the processes and structures of our current understanding (Greenway 4-5, 7). It can also further “ghettoize” the histories of marginalized groups, continuing to position them as an afterthought even if they are eventually included (Greenway 5). The better solution is to use forgotten histories to transform our understanding of a given period. For instance, if feminist historiography proposes that “‘woman’ can only be understood as a relational term,” then “men and masculinity need to be looked at in order to understand what is happening to women” (Greenway 5-6). Similarly, instead of simply adding a chapter on the American Socialist public and its publications to histories of American politics and journalism, this history should be used to learn how both radical and mainstream Americans understood themselves and their relation to each other. One way to look at this is through the counterpublic constituted by the American Socialists, and the language and media that came out of it.

This work takes the *Appeal to Reason* as a mediated expression of the pre-war Socialist public in the United States, with the aim of using its contents and practices to explore the self-understanding of American Socialists, and of applying theories of the counterpublic to a historical case study. Michael Warner’s (2002) work on the

discourses and language of counterpublics is used to find that the American Socialists, while they formed a counterpublic according to their self-understanding and subjectivity, prioritized reacting and appealing to the mainstream in their discourses. In this way they missed an opportunity to fully transform their ways of thinking and relating to the world. Negt and Kluge (1993) are similarly concerned with how a counterpublic and its media can open new horizons of experience and understanding for its members. Applying their work to the practices and mode of production at the *Appeal to Reason* shows that while the paper (and radical media like it) has been criticized for its conventionally hierarchical structure, it had several features that made it possible for members of the American Socialist counterpublic to communicate in a way that was fundamentally separate from the dominant public sphere. The conclusion is that while the American Socialist counterpublic did for a time constitute an alternative space of political action, it did not fulfill all the possible ways that Warner and Negt and Kluge envision to revolutionize the worldview and self-understanding of members of subaltern counterpublics.

Chapter One reviews two groups of literature: a dominant historiography of American journalism in the twentieth century that relies on work by the Chicago School of sociology, and several theorists on the public sphere and the counterpublic who provide a theoretical framework. The literature review of historiography establishes the need to incorporate the history of the *Appeal to Reason*, and early radical media like it, in order to more accurately understand the development of American journalism and its audiences. Chapter One also outlines the main points of the theories of the counterpublic used in the following chapters.

Chapter Two looks at the discourses of the American Socialist public through the text of the *Appeal to Reason*. Using this information, the chapter evaluates how Warner's work on the effect of subaltern counterpublics on the ability of individuals to create alternative modes of understanding can be applied to the Socialist counterpublic. Warner positions his theoretical framework as applicable to all counterpublics, but his case studies, among them feminist and queer counterpublics, are based on identities generally understood as more personal and physical. The Socialist counterpublic was subaltern due to political and class identity, rather than embodied identity. Can Warner's work help to understand political and class identity, and do these types of counterpublics build new types of expression in the same way? The discourses and narratives described in this chapter show that the Socialists understood themselves as a marginalized group, but this did not lead to the creation of fundamentally different discourses in the same way as the counterpublics Warner describes. Instead, the combination of a defensive attitude to the dominant public and desire to win over new members to the Socialist cause led to the use of discourses and narratives that mirrored and reversed ones that already existed in that dominant public. Warner's framework is shown to be applicable for the most part, but the text of the *Appeal to Reason* suggests that even stigmatized political publics are at risk of projecting their speech towards potential new members at the expense of building an independent mode of expression.

Chapter Three uses the work of Negt and Kluge to explore whether the American Socialist counterpublic could have had a more transformational function. The *Appeal's* largely working-class audience, and the genuinely working-class nature of the American Socialist public, make it possible to bring in their work on the "proletarian

public sphere.” In contrast to Warner, Negt and Kluge pay little attention to the textual content of the media of publics. Their concern is with the structure of how media is produced, and how media of a proletarian public sphere could be produced and distributed differently. They argue that media produced in the same highly-capitalized, industrial way as media of the bourgeois public sphere will inevitably be alienating to working class audiences, because it will reproduce their workplace experiences. A newspaper made by and for a proletarian public sphere needs to have more flexible and organic features of production, design, and economic structure to have emancipatory potential. While not perfectly exemplifying media of the proletarian public sphere, the *Appeal* did overcome in several areas of its production the division of ideas and labour, hierarchy, and segmentation of information and experience that Negt and Kluge believe limit the ability of a proletarian counterpublic to mobilize. In this way the American Socialist public did possess a media outlet that fostered an independent and uniquely working-class mode of expression. The paper’s overall hierarchical business organization, which has been noted and critiqued by other authors, was an important limitation but not a defining one.

The American Socialist counterpublic’s partial achievement of a mode of expression and media production independent of the dominant, largely bourgeois public sphere offers a new insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a social movement that was surprisingly strong, but short-lived. By pairing Warner’s work, which is based on the discourses found in texts produced within a counterpublic, and Negt and Kluge, who base their work on the structure of media, the following chapters also show that both aspects are needed to understand the output of oppositional publics. This work will also

show that the *Appeal to Reason*, which has been dismissed by some theorists of alternative media as being essentially the same in nature as any mainstream mass-produced newspaper, still has more to teach us.

Chapter 1 – Countercurrents in the Reading Public

The *Appeal to Reason* has largely escaped the attention of researchers, and little of its material has been drawn on in studies of U.S. journalism. This disappearance, along with that of other radical publications, contributes to a perception that journalism at the turn of the century was defined by the division between relatively passive, uneducated, working-class readers who consumed “story” based journalism, and more educated and wealthy consumers of “information” journalism (Schudson 120). Without the inclusion of the *Appeal* and newspapers of its kind, the working class reading public loses much of its agency and dignity in this history. More practically, there is a need to challenge histories that confirm existing biases against marginalized groups by leaving out crucial information. This chapter will make a case for re-examining the *Appeal to Reason* using public-sphere theory rather than another influential approach that derives from the Chicago School of sociology, and for using the work of both Michael Warner and Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge when discussing the counterpublic.

A popular school of thought in journalism historiography sees newspapers as an avenue for socialization and transmitting mainstream values. But in order to claim that this is a natural role for the press in the United States determined by its appeal to non-elite readers, it is necessary to ignore the rich history of U.S. working-class periodicals. This model also does not account for the roles that some publications have played within social movements. The real reasons that working-class readers engaged with both mainstream and radical publications are more complex.

The conventional school of thought is exemplified by Michael Schudson's influential *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (1978), but can be found in journalism analysis since the early twentieth century. Google Scholar finds over 1600 citations for *Discovering the News*, and this well-known book has influenced much of the later work on U.S. journalism.

Most histories of American journalism have accepted that “yellow” newspapers such as Joseph Pulitzer's *New York Journal* (1895-1937) and William Randolph Hearst's *New York World* (1860-1931) owed their success to their “low” subject matter as much as their low price. For instance, in their popular textbook, Emery, Emery and Roberts (1996) explain that while sensationalist journalism was not absolutely necessary to attract a “mass” readership, the “sins of yellow journalism” were behind the huge circulation of those newspapers (194-200). “Yellow” papers, also often called sensationalist, such as Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, were characterized by many illustrations, large headlines, entertaining but irrelevant stories, and elaborate self-promotion (Schudson 95-96). Many historians number among their sins indirectly starting the Spanish-American War when their sensational reporting created a frenzy of support for war among the general population (Shore, “Selling Socialism” 154). Emery et al. explain that the newly-arrived immigrant working class, who made up a large part of the yellow newspapers' readership were “poor and ill-informed,” and one-fourth were illiterate (213). However, it is not clear if this means illiterate in English or in any language, because as we have seen there was a thriving market in non-English language radical newspapers catering to new immigrants (Emery *et al* 213). Emery et al. devote a paragraph to the Socialist

press, but it is not connected to other trends of the time and the alternative press in general is summed up as having “limited success” (213). The real heroes of this narrative are Pulitzer in his later years, Scripps, and others who created the modern professionalized press (Emery *et al.* 216-222).

Schudson presents a more nuanced but ultimately similar view. His chapter covering the turn of the century summarizes this period in journalism as one divided between journalism of the “story” (the yellow newspapers) and that of “information” (more highbrow newspapers such as the *New York Times*) (90-91). Schudson does not aim to show that one type of journalism was better than the other, but he does argue that the content and presentation of sensationalist newspapers was fundamentally attractive to working class readers, and explains their success (90, 119-120). This was because the lower classes, especially new immigrants from overseas and rural areas, craved the aesthetic, storytelling function of the sensationalist press in order to make sense of their new world (Schudson 102-103). Based on his interpretation of George Herbert Mead, an early American sociologist, Schudson argues that “the news serves primarily to create, for readers, satisfying aesthetic experiences which help them to interpret their own lives and to relate them to the nation, town, or class to which they belong” (89). These readers were “dependent and non-participant” and in need of “the moral counsel of stories” (Schudson 120, 106). Schudson briefly discusses the foreign-language press, but concludes that this was for the most part a throwback to older European styles of periodical that immigrants eventually moved beyond (98). In sum, Schudson recognizes two varieties of newspaper at this time, and believes that each was “adapted to the life experience” of either the lower or upper (and upper-middle) classes. While observing

that the sensationalist press had merit, he also calls readers of the informational press “more mature, more encompassing, more differentiated, more integrated” (120).

Without aiming to be judgmental, Schudson’s interpretation nonetheless ignores the agency that working class readers at the time did in fact exercise.

Schudson’s views in this chapter on the function of journalism for new immigrant workers and other lower-class people derive from a prominent school of thought in 20th century U.S. sociology that studied the integration of immigrants and the working classes into mainstream values. The Chicago School of sociology rose to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s, and was the first group of sociologists to study urban life, immigrants, and the working class in the United States. As such, these sociologists often touched on the role of the press. Two prominent figures of the Chicago School who have influenced Schudson’s work, and other historians of journalism, are Robert E. Park and George Herbert Mead. The fundamental question for Park is how society maintains cohesion and productive function, not whether this state is just or who it benefits (Turner xi). He subscribes to an equilibrium theory of society, in which society is constantly responding to dislocations and moving back towards equilibrium (Park ‘Human Ecology’ 77). For Park, “all social problems turn out finally to be problems of social control (Park, “Social Control” 209). Important forms of social control are public opinion, whose movement follows the patterns of the natural world, and institutions (Park, “Social Control” 215-217, 221-222). News can be disruptive, because discussion generally leads to conflict and not accommodation (Turner xlv). However, Park believed that newspapers were turning away from opinion and towards

information, which gave them the potential to create social stability and solidarity (Turner xlv, xxviii).

In Park's view this need for narrative in newspapers is because cohesion in society had previously been accomplished through tradition and stable interpersonal relationships of the village. The early rural newspaper printed all the minutiae of village life (Park, "The Natural History" 282). The city newspaper could never hope to accomplish this, but its "stories" approximated the effect by providing human-interest tales that symbolically involved all readers in the community of the city (Park, "The Natural History" 277). Again, the narrative aspect of newspapers serves to bind the working class and immigrants to general society.

Like Schudson, Park identifies narrative and sensational journalism with the working classes. For workers, the yellow papers served an emotional and symbolic function that the middle classes did not need. While Park offers some initial historical justification for his views of working-class preferences, he concludes with an argument that working-class abilities are naturally limited: "the ordinary man...thinks in concrete images, anecdotes, pictures, and parables. He finds it difficult and tiresome to read a long article unless it is dramatized and takes the form of what newspapers call a "story"" (Park, "The Natural History" 284).

Mead's conception of the purpose of communication, and by extension, journalism, also manages to miss its relevance to social and political power. This is because, like the rest of the Chicago School, he is concerned with discovering the mechanisms of "social control;" those processes that force individuals to conform to a monolithic society. For Mead, communication is part of the organization of society so

far as it means that the individual has to identify with the other, and therefore become more self-aware (Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* 253). This allows self-criticism, or viewing the self as others do, and is an important mechanism of social control (Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* 255). Journalism facilitates this function because “one can enter into the attitude and experience of other persons” through journalistic storytelling (Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* 257). Therefore, the Chicago School, and scholars like Schudson who have been influenced by them, have been interested in how and what is transmitted by media, but not in whether discourses might travel and circulate in many more directions. The theories of the public sphere that we look at propose a similar function for journalism, but believe even lower class individuals have more agency in communication.

Besides the absence of radical publications, there are two important gaps in the explanations of the early Chicago School and of Schudson for the popularity of penny tabloids: the yellow papers, however cynically, were often engaged in muckraking reporting and campaigns against corporate power, and they were cheap. Compared to the *New York Times*, the populist anger of the yellow papers would have appealed to the lower classes, who, it is often forgotten, were more class conscious than they have been later in the 20th century. The yellow papers were also inexpensive, usually one cent a copy. When the *New York Times* lowered its own price to one cent, it also saw large increases in circulation almost immediately (Schudson 114). Schudson repeats the conviction of Adolph Ochs, the publisher of the *Times*, that “many people bought the *World* and the *Journal* because they were cheap, not only because they were sensational” (Schudson 115).

The historical narrative in *Discovering the News* and histories like it begins to look less satisfying when the existence of working-class, radical newspapers in both English and foreign languages is taken into account. New immigrants may have needed uncomplicated articles in English, but in New York and other major cities there was at least one, and probably more, newspapers in the language of each major immigrant group (Bekken, “The Working Class” 152, Shore *et al.* 1992). In addition, labour, socialist, and other radical papers were also available to cater to the working-class readership, and were often very popular in addition to being densely written and intellectually challenging. If the features of the yellow press were due to innate preferences of working class readers, why did so many of them buy newspapers that were dense, political, and challenging?

The circulation of radical publications was significant, and some papers like the *Appeal to Reason* were comparable to large mainstream papers – although the *Appeal* was weekly and national. They were activist, confrontational, and loudly critical of the deep divisions in living standards and power between the classes in the United States. Unlike the middle-class newspapers, radical newspapers were angry and emotional. But unlike the yellow journals, their critical, “muckraking” content came from political conviction and aimed to cause real change. While wanting to create wide publicity for their causes and raise circulation, the radical papers were also more concerned with educating and imparting information to their readers. For the *Appeal*, this was a commonly mentioned aim of the newspaper and its affiliated publishing activity. Popular topics in the paper were resolutions from important unions (cf. “Miners Declare for Socialism,” “Hatters on Strike”), economic policy (cf. “In possession of private

advices,” “The tariff tax”), actions of state and federal representatives (cf. “Senatorial Treachery,” “Wage Workers and the Law”), corruption (cf. “Looting the Commonwealth,” “How Railroads Angle for Millions with Federal Judges as Bait”), and working conditions (cf. “Victory in the Frank Lane Case”). The *Appeal* also published accounts of strikes that rarely found their way into mainstream coverage, and investigative reporting and fiction on substandard working conditions, such as the serialized publication of *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair in 1905.

The *Appeal* was a challenging paper: it consistently emphasized the importance for working-class people of reading books on economics, society, and politics, including such heavy works as Marx’s *Capital* (“Books Laboring People Should Read”). While it published on a wide range of topics in politics and economics, the *Appeal* did not provide much light entertainment, and indeed, often used a hectoring tone in exhorting its audience to work harder towards the goal of Socialism that modern audiences would find unpalatable. Advertisements appearing in almost every issue for cheap paperback copies of these books from the *Appeal*’s publishing company were accompanied by the slogan, “To Remain Ignorant is to Remain a Slave.” Illustrations were few, and the layout, while professional, was neither bright nor simple. With a subscription, the *Appeal* also cost a penny per issue. While setting out to explain differences in media consumption between classes, Schudson uses class very little in his analysis. He looks at the outcome of class membership – the experience of being working class or middle class – but not the origins of class membership. In journalism historiography shaped by Chicago School sociology, the working classes are understood as consumers passively experiencing the changes of the early twentieth century, and the uniquely working-class

publications they built are overlooked. Studying these publications from the perspective of public sphere theory brings the agency of these lower-class audiences back into the picture.

The five authors on publics and counterpublics discussed here are all connected with Jurgen Habermas' well-known reformulation of the idea of the public in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). It is this work that set the stage for a variety of later writings critiquing and adding to Habermas' concept of the bourgeois public sphere and arguing for the existence of other types of publics, especially publics belonging to social subordinates of the bourgeois white men who formed Habermas' classical public: women, servants and workers, people of colour, and other "subalterns." Nancy Fraser, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, and Michael Warner have critiqued, made use of, and added to Habermas' work, but for all of them his study of the particular bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is foundational. They also examine many of the same questions about media and the public of the Chicago School sociologists. But while Chicago School theories simplify and disempower, public-sphere theorists find more complex phenomena. Feeling that one's own thoughts are also held in common with others, that one is acting and taking in information in common with strangers, and working with others to establish new concepts and modes of expression gives agency to those who are part of a public. In Michael Warner's (2002) theory of the public, he claims that the text addresses its audience both as individuals and as a group of strangers, and it is this quality that "gives a general social relevance to private thought and life. Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others" (Warner 77). For Nancy Fraser (1989),

this group framework, or subjectivity of being part of a group, is essential for everyone's understanding of their identity and the development of shared discourses. The public does not serve only as a space of debate or conversation, it creates a set of language and terminology (Fraser 114). In these models, communication and media in a public sphere do not form subjectivities that facilitate social control, but instead circulate discourse and build individual identity.

Although Habermas argues that the public sphere and our modern concept of the private originated with the bourgeois class in the eighteenth century, he does not put much faith in the pretensions of this class. Part of Habermas' definition of the public sphere is that "the fully developed bourgeois public sphere was based on the fictitious identity of the two roles assumed by the privatized individuals who came together to form a public: the role of property owners and the role of human beings pure and simple" (56). He notes that the model he describes probably never existed in reality. Rather, it was and is an ideal that shapes many elements of society. If this ideal ever existed in reality, this could only have been for a short time when capitalism was almost totally free of state and other restrictions (86-87, 79). Nor can Habermas fairly be said to idealize the bourgeois public sphere. He notes that the public sphere's claim to represent all human beings, while being predicated on keeping some of them out, naturally had dehumanizing implications for the lower classes (85).

For Habermas, what made the space of the public possible was the simultaneous existence of a private sphere and private people as they had not existed before. This is why Habermas writes of a *bourgeois* public sphere, and why he believed that although it was possible for other types of public spheres to exist, the bourgeois public sphere was

its basic type. It was possible for bourgeois men to form a public because they were private and independent people. The economic aspects of their lives could be completely separate from their interactions with each other, making it theoretically possible to “bracket” inequalities between themselves and therefore debate public matters “so that the better argument could assert itself” (Habermas 27, 36).

While the public is now equated with work and the private with family, in the classic public sphere the private encompassed both the family and its economic support (Habermas 154, 28-29, 46). This was unique to the bourgeois: neither the aristocracy nor the lower classes formed economically self-sufficient family units in the same way (Habermas 84-85). This self-sufficiency was what allowed the bourgeoisie to ultimately claim for themselves the basic definition of humanity. They were able to at least pretend to have the freedom to form objective opinions and knowledge based not on private interests but rather on their own free reason (Habermas 56). The public sphere then, was the space created by these private persons discussing and debating public issues, which were those not pertaining to the bourgeois individual’s business or family. This public sphere also incorporated institutions where discussion could be carried out, like the salon, the coffeehouse, and the newspaper, that facilitated communication between individuals (Habermas 33-34).

All of this though, while it allowed the bourgeois class to give their control of political processes a form of legitimacy, was also creating weapons for those who were excluded from the public sphere (Habermas 126). Habermas is most interested in the developments that have occurred in the public sphere as a result of the consolidation of capitalism, and the simultaneous development of demands from non-bourgeois people

for access to the public sphere (Habermas 196-199). This means that non-bourgeois people are trying to conduct public life through a structure that was always meant to exclude them, making political life inherently dysfunctional and harming the ability of workers and other subalterns to organize (Habermas 200-201; Negt and Kluge xlvi). Habermas brings his account of the bourgeois public sphere up to the 1960s by arguing that while it was always contradictory in nature and far from emancipatory in practice, we have based our political systems on the concept (197). In addition, while the bourgeois public sphere excluded many groups, it also contained a radical ideal – that policies should be determined by the free debate of everyone involved (Habermas 208). Rather than expand the reach of this ideal, modern societies have continued to place their faith in the vestiges of the bourgeois public sphere that was never particularly effective and has now been almost totally undermined (Habermas 210). The other possibility for a more emancipatory public life is to create alternative public spheres. Several writers have followed up on Habermas' brief mention of a "variant of a plebian public sphere that has, as it were, been suppressed within the historical process" (qtd. in Negt and Kluge xliv).

Nancy Fraser's well-known critique of Habermas' work is valuable in illustrating the possibility of other publics. Habermas does in fact acknowledge the possibility of alternative publics, including a proletarian public, but believes the dominance of the bourgeois public sphere did not allow them to become fully formed (37-38). Fraser charges that it is difficult for the reader to take away a concept of the public sphere that is not particular to the bourgeois public sphere (58). It is true that Habermas' concept is so finely balanced on the purely private and self-sufficient nature

of its participants that it is difficult to conceive of how the working-class publics that he mentions could function. If the bourgeois public sphere collapsed from the intrusion of monopolistic private interests and the subsequent intermingling of public and private, how could working-class people maintain a “public” discussion, when they are defined by their dependency and lack of privacy?

Fraser quotes work by Mary Ryan showing North American women, for example, formed a variety of publics, even during the golden age of the bourgeois public sphere, and solves this difficulty by widening the definition of the public (61). For Fraser, there are and have been since the origins of the bourgeois public, competing “subaltern” publics that define themselves partly against the dominant public, but also act to create independent discourse and identity for their members (67). Subaltern, in this sense, means a “subordinated social group” who are at a “disadvantage in official public spheres” (Fraser 67). In turn, the dominant, bourgeois public sphere always defined itself against these groups (Fraser 61). The private as experienced only by property-owning members of the bourgeois public sphere is then not a prerequisite to forming a public. Groups who have not had access to this have still formed communities where identity and subjectivity could be formed in an independent setting.

This means that there is not one ‘public sphere,’ from which most people are excluded, but that there is one dominant public and a multiplicity of counterpublics, which may interact or overlap (70). For Fraser, the space where these all exist and interact is the public sphere (68). Subaltern counterpublics differ from others within this sphere in that they have a “dual character. On the one hand, they function as

spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (Fraser 68). While Fraser sees this as a source of strength, the following work suggests that for political counterpublics it can be a significant weakness.

Michael Warner builds on Fraser’s work but expands the possibilities and definition of the public even further. There can be many, many publics, and one can belong to any number. The public is simply a way of being addressed, and of receiving this address: imagining a group of people who are not related to each other in any other way than to be part of this public, yet are brought together, as an “imagined community,” by the punctual circulation of discourse within the group. This circulation at predictable times is very important: “only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated, can a text address a public” (Warner 90).

Warner places cultural production is at the center of publics, rather than – as Habermas describes – simply forming institutions for them. Also, for Warner, the members of a public *must* be strangers. This is integral to the special subjectivity, and much of the power of a public. They see themselves as the self, and a stranger to others, at the same time, giving their inner thoughts a wider significance (Warner 77). This seems to preclude some institutions mentioned by Habermas, such as the salon or coffeehouse, where individuals met in person (although punctually) to discuss issues, and were probably personally acquainted. For Habermas this would not have mattered to the world-making function of the public, because bourgeois individuals were insulated from each other through their economic independence. A dual subjectivity of the

bourgeois man as public figure and as private family member and economic actor, would still have existed. By requiring that members of a public be strangers, Warner is able to show that members of the public he envisioned would still possess a complex subjectivity comprising both public and private without the bourgeois dynamic of property ownership. It is also a uniquely modern subjectivity.

Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner represent one legacy of Habermas' thought, but others have taken his ideas in different directions. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge expand on Habermas' mention of working-class public spheres in *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (1993). They too investigate the possibility of subaltern counterpublics, but they do not extend the definition of the public as widely as Fraser and Warner, and therefore find it much less likely that fully formed versions of these publics have actually existed. The purpose of their book is to describe how it would be possible to bring what they call a proletarian public sphere into existence.

Negt and Kluge see the question primarily from the perspective of media, and they have a somewhat different account of how the public sphere has changed in the modern era. In addition to remaining vestiges of the classic public sphere, they believe that "partial publics" have now developed. These partial publics perform the same world-making function as a real public, but they take place in realms that would be considered private in the classic public sphere, such as the workplace and the home and family (Negt and Kluge 13). These are not full public spheres, because while they shape experience, they do not accept input and open discourse in the way that the bourgeois public sphere did for some (Negt and Kluge 14-15). Mass media form a partial public

sphere that enters the home directly, and workplace settings, especially factories, form partial public spheres that workers spend much of their lives in but cannot control (Negt and Kluge 49-53).

All public spheres are modes of “organization of experience” (Negt and Kluge 28). The public sphere a person moves within determines what aspects of experience can be understood, expressed, and valorized, and which are impossible to express, no matter how important they may be. The experience of the proletarian – the working class person – has been to exist within a bourgeois public sphere that does not recognize many of their experiences (Negt and Kluge 7, 14). Using a Marxist approach, Negt and Kluge argue that experience is derived from structures of production, rather than from discourse as Fraser and Warner describe. The dominant public sphere and partial public spheres shape the experiences of anyone within them through capitalist production. Alternate, proletarian public spheres must also have different modes of production, or they will be merely “defensive” and not fundamentally different (Negt and Kluge 57, 61). These defensive public spheres can create temporary spaces for workers, but cannot really widen horizons of experience or hold back other forms of authoritarianism that appeal to workers in the same way, such as fascism (Negt and Kluge 61).

For the purposes of this study, the work of Warner and of Negt and Kluge is complementary. Warner’s model of the counterpublic is centered almost exclusively on discourse and how readers are positioned by these discourses. Negt and Kluge are mostly concerned with the structure of the counterpublic, and how its media is produced and delivered. Each of these analyses is necessary to evaluate the nature of the

American Socialist counterpublic through its national weekly newspaper, the *Appeal to Reason*.

There is a definite need to look at publications like the *Appeal to Reason* – radical American publications from before World War I – from the perspective of public-sphere theory. In the last half of the twentieth century a great deal of work has gone into cataloguing and making available pre-war socialist (and some anarchist) publications (Conlin 1974, *Labor Press Project*). There is a wealth of information available in these publications, but as several media-history scholars have noted for the most part this material has either not been examined at all, or it has been used as a source for studies of particular organizations, such as the Socialist Party or the International Workers of the World (Sclater 2001, Bekken 1988). The Labor Press Project at the University of Washington has compiled a bibliography of writing on labour newspapers as well as archives of the newspapers themselves. Several papers have been written that are not very analytical but seek to illustrate the importance of the newspapers, relate them to important social events and call for further study (Bekken 1988, 1993, Sclater 2009, Streitmatter 1999). Conlin (1974) and Shore, Fones-Wolf and Danky (1992) catalogue a wide variety of publications and provide historical context and the outlines of the lifetime of each publication. There are also two contemporary books specifically about the *Appeal to Reason*: “The Story of the *Appeal*,” (1917) by George Allan England, and “The Fighting Editor,” (1910) by George D. Brewer.

Bekken, in particular, has made a thorough overview of the scholarship on working class publications up to 1988 and found that “the reasons why the workers’ movement fought to establish and maintain these papers, their impact, the nature and

extent of their circulation, and similar questions have yet to be investigated” (“No Weapon” 106). Yet he also observes that political organizations have traditionally found it vital to have a press outlet of their own (“No Weapon” 104). The work that follows on the *Appeal* will show that all such publications are important sources for the study, not just of the organizations they were affiliated with, but of the complex ways in which social movements have brought people together and achieved change.

Given the importance of adding to the small amount of work on the content of the *Appeal to Reason* in the context of its place as the national weekly newspaper of the American Socialist counterpublic, the following chapter will analyze the discourses in the *Appeal*, with the assumption that they are representative of the American Socialist counterpublic, using Michael Warner’s theoretical framework. The third chapter will look at how the structure and production of the *Appeal* fulfilled in part Negt and Kluge’s definition of media of the proletarian public sphere.

The *Appeal to Reason* is important because it alerts us to the existence of a public, and how this public operated. A public is not the same as an ideological, social, or political group – it is a mode of “world-making,” or experience, that has developed in the modern Western world, and now spread beyond it (Warner 10). The mainstream journalism historiography reviewed above hints at this function, but without acknowledging its full potential, especially for emancipation and empowerment. Habermas shows how the exchange of differing viewpoints in the relatively unstructured environment of the public allows participants to create frameworks of understanding even in the face of hegemonic ideas. For instance, Fraser observes how the feminist counterpublic has been able to create and popularize the concepts of “marital, date and

acquaintance rape” within a culture that, without intervention, was incapable of conceiving of them (Fraser 67). The next chapter explores some of the narratives produced by American Socialists in this context, and evaluates their potential to create discursive agency for members of this public.

Chapter 2 – Socialist Discourses in the *Appeal to Reason*

The *Appeal to Reason* was arguably the most important American Socialist publication of the early 20th century. As such, it has a great deal to say about this understudied political movement, and about how the concepts of public, counterpublic, and subaltern counterpublic can be applied to political formations beyond those already cited by theorists. This chapter will explore how the Socialist public expressed in the *Appeal* conforms to existing notions of a counterpublic, by looking at some of its most prominent discourses and modes of address.

According to Fraser, a subaltern counterpublic stands in contrast to the universalizing public or publics described by Habermas, which “frame their address as the universal discussion of the people” (Warner 117). The subaltern counterpublic, defined by its status, knows that it cannot take this position. The discourses that circulate within it “formulate oppositional interpretations,” according to Fraser, but for Warner they also have an effect on the consciousness and subjectivity of their members (Warner 120). Counterpublics in this model are “defined by their tension with a larger public” and “an awareness of (their) subordinate status” (56). A counterpublic is a coming together of people that “ordinary people are presumed not to want to be mistaken for” and participants know that their discourses face clearly marked barriers (Warner 120). This mutual consciousness in turn forms the identity of the participants (Warner 120-121). At the same time, a counterpublic operates on the same terms as a public: it projects “the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity” and by its nature as the discourse among an imaginary community of strangers, will always be

addressing more and more people, anyone who eventually can be made to “recognize themselves in its address” (Warner 120, 121).

Although his work effectively explains the impact of publics on the modern understanding of self, in his detailed examples and arguments Warner focuses on gender and sexual identity. This leaves open the question of how much his conclusions about the effect of counterpublics on personal subjectivity can hold for counterpublics of political, rather than inherent identity. Warner’s discussion is centered on self-identified embodied qualities of group members such as gender or sexual orientation, but does briefly note, without expanding further, that the formation of counterpublics is not limited to these categories. He applies this definition to all counterpublics, including “Some youth-culture publics or artistic publics” (57). A counterpublic can be any public that is structured as oppositional to the dominant public or publics, that constitutes a setting for discourse with “a critical relation to power,” “making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying” (56). This would certainly include the American Socialist public.

The American Socialist public allows us to expand on how other types of identity work with Warner’s theory of the counterpublic by looking at a public that could not be said to be part of the dominant public sphere as Habermas imagined it, but that was stigmatized by class and political, rather than embodied identity. As such, the subaltern status of the American Socialist counterpublic may have been expressed in a different way. This is visible from the discourses in the *Appeal to Reason*, which were not transformational, only oppositional. Members of the American Socialist public sought to directly reverse mainstream discourses that worked to marginalize socialists or

working-class people. This entailed an acute awareness of mainstream discourses and their dominant nature, and a rhetorical strategy that reacted to and reappropriated mainstream discourses far more than creating new ones. It also sought to imitate the bourgeois public, which was still only in the process of the type of disintegration that Habermas describes, and to assert the legitimacy of its working-class members in the mainstream public. The *Appeal to Reason* provides evidence that the effect of this on the subjectivity of members of the American Socialist public was less emancipatory than that of counterpublics of identity, or of political groups that do not aspire to move into the mainstream.

The *Appeal*, of course, did not in itself constitute the American socialist public. A public is a projected group of people brought together by their attention to a text or texts, and the discourses that circulate among them (Warner 67). For Warner, a public can form around a single text or periodical, such as the *Spectator*, an eighteenth-century satirical newspaper in London (98). He also accepts Nancy Fraser's more classic picture of a counterpublic in the "variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places" of "the late-twentieth-century feminist subaltern counterpublic" (Warner 118). The geography of a broad-based and well-entrenched counterpublic such as the American Socialists would in many ways resemble what Fraser describes. For Warner, it is also important that the discourses of a subaltern counterpublic circulate in the context of the general public's discomfort with and dislike of some defining quality of its members. This is what gives the subaltern counterpublic its significance.

For the socialists, some of the spaces in which discourses circulated were at meetings of the Socialist Party, especially of locals, which were typically between 20-150 people in small towns, and could be found throughout the rural Midwest and southwest, as well as in cities (see “Southwest Edition,” page 3 of most issues of the *Appeal to Reason* for local Party notices and information). The locals hosted and organized social events like picnics and dinners, educational lectures, and reading groups. The socialists also had their own publishing houses, most prominently Charles Kerr and Co., which advertised regularly in the *Appeal* and in 1909 took over its publication business (“Closing Out Book Sale”). These companies, like the *Appeal*’s, printed hundreds of different pamphlets, tracts, and pocket-sized books and sold them at low prices, often in bundles (“Closing Out Book Sale”). There were also many small, local socialist newspapers throughout the United States, such as *The Rebel*, the *Jewish Daily Forward*, and the *Call* (Green 9-11).

Moving beyond the strictly internal spaces of their public, socialists instigated conversation and debate in more generally public places, such as general stores, street corners, parks, their own homes, and those of neighbors. They were encouraged in the *Appeal* to write in to mainstream papers about socialism, or to submit editorials already printed in the *Appeal* under their own name (cf. “A number of comrades”). Socialist women were able to join the Party – and there was intermittent debate about how to recruit more women as dues-paying members – but there were also women’s groups and a Socialist women’s magazine, the *Progressive Woman* (“Mother Jones and Debs,” “Something Great for Women”). In this widely-dispersed network of spaces, the *Appeal to Reason* occupied a central place as the only national newspaper, and the periodical

with the highest circulation. Other popular national periodicals included the *International Socialist Review* (1900-1918), and *Wilshire's Magazine* (1900-1915). The *Appeal* printed announcements forwarded by state and town locals on page three each week, and from these it is clear that not only did many small local Socialist Party chapters start through the propaganda work of the paper, they were aware of this and highly dependent on the ability of the paper to circulate their news and views to other Socialists. Although discourses of the Socialist public circulated in a number of places and through a number of texts, the *Appeal to Reason* held a central place in this public, and an analysis of its contents is a good approximation of what was happening in texts and spaces that are less well documented.

It is important that the American Socialist public was also primarily working-class. From the *Appeal's* contents it is clear that the great majority of readers were workers or farmers for whom the price of the subscription (50 cents per year) was not negligible. The sheer quantity of subscribers in the study period -- 303 241 on January 2, 1909, up to 474 776 by the end of 1911 -- suggests that most subscribers were "average" people of the day. Another indication of the readership is the large number of reader letters and editorials. Although there was probably a certain political capital in a folksy tone, just as there is today, the idiom and pictures of life from readers mostly ring true. For example, on July 3, 1909, the *Appeal* published roughly sixty short letters from readers pledging small amounts of money to support the legal defense of the managing editor, Fred Warren ("The Army Stands by Warren"). Of \$18 053 that was raised, only a handful of pledges were for \$100.00 or more. Some of the correspondents refer to their financial situation or class:

--You can count on me for such help as a workingman can give and that on short notice. – E.D. Ladd, Pennsylvania.

--I am poor in this world's goods, but I am rich to be able to join in this fight. Fight on! It is a long lane that has no turning. – Yours for Socialism, J.W. Powell, Checotah.

--I am a poor man but enclose my pledge knowing full well you have made the sacrifice for the farmer and the working class and I am willing to help you out. – J.T. Coleman, Udall.

--Here is my pledge. I am a wage worker, but I am prouder of the fact that I am a Socialist. Keep right after them and I will stay with you till the end. – Edwin Jones, Vancouver, Wash.

--And as your persecution grows, my pocketbook, though slim, will open and continue to open until JUSTICE shall perch on your banner, which IS THE BANNER OF HUMANITY. – Dick Maple

--Pledge enclosed. I cannot stand by and see a few liberty loving people carrying the burden for us all. I believe the duty of the working class is to step in and speak out. – J.L. Clements, San Antonio. (“The Army Stands by Warren”)

Advertisers would probably have had some of the most accurate information about who the readers were, probably from the newspaper itself. The *Appeal* did not always accept advertising, but when it did the advertising copy provides a good idea of the economic and social background of readers. On January 2, 1909 the column of 1-2 inch ads on page 3 includes one for those interested in self-education, but with little money to spare for books: “PENNY CLASSICS Are the Short Cut to Culture. Only the best thoughts of the world's greatest writers. Schopenhauer, Seneca, Goethe, Plato, Emerson, Thoreau, Etc. 10 cents each, 18 pages. Write for Page of Each FREE. Penny Classics, 79 Plymouth Place, Chicago” (“Penny Classics”). There is also an ad for the reader with some savings, wishing to be independent: “Texas Land \$1.00 to \$5.00 Per Acre” and “Earn a Month's Salary In a Few Days” (“Texas Land \$1.00,” “Earn a Month's Salary”). The income promised is \$4-8 per day. Some concrete demographic

information is available from James R. Green, who has analyzed the biographies in the 1914 booklet *Who's Who in Socialist America*. This booklet profiled 495 Socialists who were top sellers of *Appeal to Reason* subscriptions (Green 14). Green uses the information on place of residence and occupation to establish that the majority of activist readers, at least, were working class (21). He finds that 281 of the 495 had a working-class occupation, but counts all 97 farmers as middle class. Since farmers at this time were heavily mortgaged and faced much the same type of exploitation as industrial workers, we can see that the representation of the comfortably middle-class was small. Only 121 lived in large cities, with the rest coming from small towns of rural areas (Green 21). One-third of the activists were born in the Midwest (Green 17).

This chapter will approach the question of how the American Socialist public fit with, and did not fit with, Michael Warner's concept of the counterpublic through an interpretive analysis of the discourses in the *Appeal to Reason* during the three years from 1909 to 1911, inclusive. The close reading resulted in the selection of two common discourses and the coverage of two stories that are characteristic of the *Appeal to Reason's*, and by extension the American Socialist public's qualities. Both are compared to similar topics in the *New York Times* from the same period, to show how a mainstream newspaper used different language and rhetorical strategies. The *Appeal's* content will show that its discourses came from a subaltern perspective, but that they incorporated and reflected back mainstream discourses, rather than creating the transformational new consciousness that Warner describes.

2.1 Americanism and Patriotism

A common – almost ubiquitous – theme in the *Appeal* was to associate Socialism with American patriotism and historical figures evocative of patriotism. This was done in a way that betrays an editorial awareness that the public formed by the *Appeal*, and Socialists in general, was marginalized and attacked for being un-American or even treasonous. The paper’s references to the American War of Independence, including various “Founding Fathers,” especially Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Thomas Paine stand out in particular. The purpose was to position Socialism’s demands for radical change as not un-American, but as the fulfillment of the country’s promise: “Socialism is thoroughly American – the contemplation of the movement for socialized power which was begun in 1776” (“Use the Local Papers”). This protected, at least rhetorically, against charges that Socialists were promoting disorder and illegality. Any measures that might be seen as extreme were instead revolutionary: “there were none to dispute King George’s “legal right” to tax the American colonists until the revolutionists of 1775-’76 took up arm “against a sea of troubles” and shot this “legal right” to death!” (“Legally Honest”) At a time when the Tea Party in the United States is making such theatrical use of these figures, it is instructive to remember that such rhetoric has been used by other American activists as a tool to gain mainstream acceptance (cf. Chernow 2010).

Thomas Jefferson was a favorite figure in the *Appeal*, especially because he had argued for the unimpeded and subsidized transportation of mail and newspapers. The paper reminded readers that:

Thomas Jefferson believed in the absolutely free transportation and delivery of the mails. When he was elected president and sent his first message to congress he specifically recommended that all postage on newspapers be removed “to facilitate the progress of information. (“Jefferson and the Mails”).

The special postage rates for periodicals were absolutely necessary to the *Appeal*'s survival, and attempts by the Post Office to revoke the *Appeal*'s privileges were a constant source of vulnerability (England 82-97). Respectful references to past presidents helped to show that socialists did not disrespect the institution, only its present state: “Between the days of Jefferson and the days of Taft capitalism has reached its fullness and there is not the slightest difference today between the capitalist president of the American republic and the crowned and sceptered despots of the old world” (“President and Emperor”).

One more category of patriotic discourse was references to other figures that could be called touchstones for patriotism: John Brown (“A Modern John Brown”), Davy Crockett (“Davie Crockett a Socialist”), and General Custer (“John Martin, Custer’s Bugler”). The *Appeal* carried on a long-running feud with President Theodore Roosevelt, even after he left office, and seems to have stepped up its patriotic rhetoric whenever Roosevelt made statements attacking socialism. For instance, on April 3, 1909 the *Appeal* observed derisively that “Roosevelt says socialism is very, very wicked because it is a “foreign importation”” (“Roosevelt Says Socialism”).

The *Appeal*'s insistence on the homegrown nature of socialism seems prescient given that much of the devastating repression of leftist radical groups during and after World War I was accomplished by successfully painting them as un-American. One of

the earliest instances in which the federal government took concrete advantage of this perception was in 1919, when the Attorney General, Alexander Palmer, deported 249 activists who were residing in the United States but had never gained American citizenship. A further 4000 were rounded up that January in a deliberately brutal and indiscriminate manner (Kennedy 290). This served as an expedient way to get rid of troublesome activists without difficult trials, and to further identify socialists and anarchists with foreigners in the public mind.

Despite the *Appeal's* strongly patriotic language, there were also tensions within its ideological position. The newspaper often promoted an internationalist outlook that was conventionally socialist, especially when discussing war and militarism. The *Appeal* was staunchly anti-war, arguing that socialism would automatically bring world peace because all war is caused by the greed of capitalists and their willingness to sacrifice workers (“The Workers are Learning”). In this vein the paper would excoriate the concept of patriotism: “National pride and glory and patriotism are coming at last to be recognized for what they are – the high sounding name under which different political divisions of the ruling classes have fought for the product of the workers” (“The Workers are Learning”). However, at other times the *Appeal* used quite patriotic language, for instance in a paragraph on the trial of Fred Warren, the publisher: “It would be funny if it were not fraught with such serious consequences to the liberties of the greatest nation on earth” (“If It Takes”).

One conclusion that can be drawn from the *Appeal's* patriotic language is that it positioned itself strongly towards new readers. On one hand, as the next chapter will discuss, the paper displayed a greater level of intertextuality than do most newspapers

today. However at the same time, the narratives of Americanism in the paper, coupled with its constant drive for new subscribers, seem partly geared towards answering the stereotypes of people who had only read about socialism in the mainstream press.

2.2 Marriage, Sex Work, and the Family

Another deliberate reversal of mainstream ideas in the discourses of the *Appeal* was around marriage, sex work, and the family. This was in direct response to a marginalizing tactic from elites, who claimed that socialism would result in the breakdown of the traditional family and that socialists advocated, or at least created conditions leading to, sexual promiscuity. For example, Theodore Roosevelt, in two widely-read articles on socialism in *The Outlook* magazine in 1909, accused socialists of being “not only convinced opponents to private property, but also bitterly hostile to religion and morality,” and insinuated that “these thoroughgoing Socialists occupy, in relation to all morality, and especially to domestic morality, a position so revolting – and I choose my words carefully – that it is difficult even to discuss it in a reputable paper” (qtd. in Debs). Such attacks had effects that were more alarming than simply discrediting socialism in general; they appealed to visceral and reactionary instincts of the members of mainstream publics and, as such, provided cover for more concrete attacks, such as excluding socialist publications from the mail or prosecuting Socialist writers and organizers on charges that had been obviously trumped up. When their dislike was activated, the mainstream public was willing to look the other way.

Roosevelt, at that time an outgoing President -- and to be elected again in 1912 -- was a solid representative of “the public,” in that he could be counted on to mobilize mainstream discourses aimed at members of an audience that saw themselves as, to borrow a modern phrase, “Real Americans.” The *Appeal to Reason* immediately went on the defensive, devoting a good deal of the April 10, 1909 issue to rebutting Roosevelt, and promising a “Reply to Roosevelt Issue” to mark May 1 (“My Reply to Roosevelt”).

The “monster issue” was by this time a well-tested tactic of the *Appeal*. For these issues, the paper would advertise several weeks in advance, and whip the “Appeal Army” into a frenzy of distribution activity. Special subscription cards were packaged with the newspaper and all readers were urged to take the opportunity to order extra issues to distribute or to sell to friends and neighbors, and to convince others to subscribe. Although the Postal Office, never sympathetic, often cracked down on the *Appeal* for mailing more issues at the discount publication rate than there were subscribers, releasing the occasional huge printing for relatively indiscriminate distribution seemed to pass under the radar. This served several useful functions. In addition to taking an opportunity to test the Postal Office’s selective enforcement of the law, the large printings, at millions of copies (the 1909 “Rescue Edition” was 2 240 000 copies) certainly reached new readers and could attract new subscribers (England 51). By promoting the issue as “special,” it created a periodic event to motivate the paper’s Army of volunteers. And it allowed the *Appeal* to claim the largest single printings of any newspaper in the United States, an important psychological triumph at a time when circulation was everything for the penny-newspaper market, competing for advertisers

interested in a relatively low-income audience. Even when the *Appeal* was not accepting advertising, beating the capitalist papers at their own game was symbolically important.

Socialists seemed particularly stung by attempts to associate their creed with sexual immorality, and their reaction was not just to deny or ignore this accusation, but to throw it back at elites and politicians. One variety of argument was that elites, in their gluttony and indulgence, were, on the contrary, the naturally immoral class. In a short item, the paper reports on Mrs. Hiscock, of Patterson, New Jersey who “married a poor man, though she is wealthy, “because, she said, “if I had married a rich man he would have had four or five other women besides me” (“Mrs. Hiscock”). The moral, the *Appeal* concludes, is that:

“Great private wealth destroys the family, debauches womankind and rots society to the core. Under an industrial democracy no one could get an income without doing useful work for it...that work would give them a normal, healthy life.” (“Mrs. Hiscock”)

Similarly, in describing an all-male society dinner, at which “a notorious courtesan” danced for the guests wearing (only) an American flag, the paper gleefully thunders against the claims of elites to be upholding either patriotism or sexual morality:

“The American flag has in this instance been worse than prostituted by this patriotic gentry of naval Newport in this saturnalia that would shame a Bowery dive, the same gentry who claim that Socialism would destroy morality and disrupt the family relation, and what will be done about it? What punishment for treason will be meted out to these offenders?” (“Wrapped in the Flag”)

Although in this instance the “painted harlot” in the story is condemned, a very common discourse in the *Appeal* was to argue that capitalism was the cause of sex work, by commodifying women as it did with other things, and also impoverishing workers and working-class families so that women were forced into it by necessity. This was not, however, a purely sociological analysis free from a concern with policing moral codes. It simply sought to turn the universal revulsion of “respectable” people for sex work back onto capitalism. The *Appeal* threw itself into the contemporary mainstream coverage of “white slavery” (sex trafficking of white women) (cf. “The Greatest Slave Market”). Although sex trafficking was a serious problem, the “white slavery” trope was a staple of tabloid journalism obviously only concerned with the wellbeing of a subset of women, and existing more to fascinate readers than to fight exploitation. The *Appeal* lifted this narrative intact to use in arguing against capitalism.

The *Appeal* made no apologies for muckraking, nor for deploying cultural prejudices and popular morality against its enemies. On January 8, 1910 the paper launched a tenacious campaign to discredit Judge Peter S. Grosscup, a strongly pro-corporate federal judge (“Judge Peter S. Grosscup, The Home Wrecker”). The final provocation seems to have been his reversal of a lower-court decision to fine Standard Oil \$12 million for anti-trust violations. The *Appeal*’s attack struck a chord with anyone who considered him or herself to be an upstanding citizen, and had luckily found a victim of Grosscup who at the time of reporting was in modest circumstances. The general story was that Grosscup had been the lover of a married woman, who had eventually left her husband, George Dougherty, and married Grosscup, taking their infant daughter who was then raised as Grosscup’s child. An extra-large headline

splashes across the whole of the front page: “JUDGE PETER S. GROSSCUP, THE HOME WRECKER,” and sub-heads reading “There is the Devil Who Broke Up My Home, Stole My Wife and Took My Little Girl from Me,” Exclaimed George Dougherty, the Exiled Father and Husband, as He Tremblingly Placed in the Hands of the Appeal’s Correspondent a Faded Tin-Type of Pete Grosscup,” and “PATHETIC STORY OF GEORGE DOUGHERTY As Related to Eugene V. Debs Sixteen Years Ago by the Man Whose Home Had Been Despoiled by Grosscup – A Domestic Tragedy With a Moral: How to Qualify for the Federal Bench” (“Judge Peter S. Grosscup, The Home Wrecker”). The stories, taking up the entirety of the front page and much of the third, allege not just the “wrecking” of the Dougherty household, but a number of other consensual affairs with married women, and the sexual assault of a chambermaid in Boston. Inside, the reporting moves on to professional and financial misdemeanors.

The story caused a stir not just among socialists but also in the public at large. The *Appeal* was in the habit of reprinting items from mainstream papers in which it had been mentioned or its material had been reprinted, and doggedly documented the impact of its own story among “respectable” papers for months. In March 1910 it upped the ante by challenging Grosscup to either sue for libel or resign, which caused an even bigger stir, with mainstream papers chiming in to note that no libel suit seemed forthcoming. On the front page of the February 19th, 1910 issue, the *Appeal* printed excerpts of two editorials from the *National Prohibitionist* and the *Medina Gazette* (a paper affiliated with the Republican Party). Interestingly, the *Gazette* does not mention the *Appeal* by name, but repeats its story of Grosscup’s corruption and “moral perversion,” adding language of its own: “He is an Ashland, Ohio, product mentally

well equipped, but morally close to the degenerate class” (reprinted in the *Appeal to Reason*, “From the Gazette”). Further mentions in the mainstream press show the efficacy of the *Appeal*’s mix of salacious disclosure and deployment of the language of morality. The *Dexter Dispatch* lauded the *Appeal*’s “Astonishing Aggressiveness,” and the *Times* of Girard, Kansas, said, “The Times lacks a whole lot of being socialistic, but we do believe the Appeal to Reason is offering a pretty fair proposition” referring to the *Appeal*’s offer to submit proof of its Grosscup stories to Congress, and if found to be lying, agreeing to be barred from the mail system (“Astonishing Aggressiveness”). The *Appeal*’s own language was not so different, and often, as with the Grosscup story, grabbed the attention of the mainstream public.

The story spread to Socialist Party locals, resulting in resolutions:

’Scum’ and ’vermin’ were terms emphatically applied to Judge Peter Stenger Grosscup in the Chicago Federation of Labor at its meeting Sunday, when a set of resolutions came before that body asking for a congressional investigation of the charges made by the Appeal to Reason, the Socialist weekly, of Girard, Kan. The resolutions aroused one of the most enthusiastic discussions ever indulged in by the delegates of the federation. (“Demands Grosscup be Impeached”)

It is understandable that Socialist Party rank-and-file members were enthusiastic at being able to take a position of moral superiority against such a well-known symbol of corporate-state collusion. The impact of the *Appeal*’s story in the mainstream public also shows how the socialists could sometimes succeed in taking a mainstream discourse, modifying it to suit their own purposes, and circulating that discourse back into the mainstream.

Against the image of the debauched upper class is contrasted an alternative ideal of the secure and happy working-class home, under attack from outside forces, and for most workers a goal yet to be realized. In recounting the case of a widow attempting to claim compensation from the Rock Island Railway for the workplace death of her husband, the *Appeal* begins by painting a brief portrait of their happy but modest home:

“A few years ago in a little western town lived Albert M. Dawson and his young wife, Daisy. It was a happy household – the counterpart of thousands of other workingmen’s homes. . . . It was lonely for the wife when Albert was away on “his run,” but there was laughter and song when he returned for a brief respite. In the course of time there were several little Dawsons and then the home-coming was gladdened by happy cries of “papa” and a search through the pockets for hidden presents.” (“The Brakeman’s Widow”)

This imagery circulated throughout the socialist public. The *Appeal* often printed “Editorials from Readers,” and in one a female writer addresses other women:

“Hundreds of thousands of American women and children there are who are wearing out their lives in most unsanitary factories, mines and other menial labor, and thousands of men, who through no fault of their own have no where to lay their heads. What of conserving their homes? . . . And every intelligent woman, who truly senses the call of the time, will feel it her mission to do her utmost toward the installation of a social and economic system which shall create and conserve the ideal American home. . . . - Socialism.” (La Dieux Keiton)

Similarly, the *Appeal* printed announcements for socialist party locals, and the secretary of the Gainesville, Texas local wrote on August 6, 1910: “Senator Bailey spoke here July 22nd and said among other things that Socialism would tear down the home, abolish the church and that Socialists would not make good neighbors or citizens and that he

would debate the question with anybody after the primaries. See what you can do for him” (“From Bailey Burg.”).

A last notable discourse asserted that socialism created better conditions for reproduction and the raising of children, for instance in the October 8, 1910 issue:

“Boys sleep on the floor” is the heading of an article in a Kansas City paper, referring to the waifs who apply in unexpected numbers at the Boys’ Hotel...Millions for luxury and debauchery – but the boys and girls must kennel like dogs and hogs! When we get Socialism there will be nothing like this occur (sic.). We shall not only sleep the children well, but they shall be clothed well and schooled and taught some useful vocation. (“A Glorious City”)

And just one column over, a short item states: “Milwaukee, according to the late census, has the highest birthrate of any city in the union. Another evidence that Socialism opposes marriage, and the home” (“Milwaukee”). Milwaukee was at that time under a Socialist city government.

Socialists were charged with opposing the “ideal American home” and childrearing, and their national newspaper made it a point not just to remind readers that this was untrue, but that these values should in fact lead to support for socialism. Discourses about the morality of sexuality, marriage, and family in the *Appeal* therefore showed an awareness of the subaltern status of Socialists, and also illustrate the socialist public’s practice of reversing mainstream discourses to a greater extent than developing their own.

2.3 The Story of the Black Patch Tobacco War

We can also learn about the American Socialists' type of counterpublic from the *Appeal's* coverage of particular stories, and a comparison of this with coverage in a contemporary mainstream newspaper. In coverage of the following two news events, we can again find the qualities so far noteworthy about the American Socialist counterpublic: an awareness of the subaltern status of members (per Michael Warner's definition), and the reversal of mainstream narratives.

The Black Patch Tobacco War was a series of riots and vigilante disturbances in the "Black Patch," a region of Southwestern Kentucky and Northwestern Tennessee where tobacco growing was the predominant economic activity (Waldrep 6). By the end of the nineteenth century a cartel had developed that effectively controlled the price of raw tobacco bought from farmers, leading to a dramatic drop in the incomes of growers and widespread poverty (Waldrep 34-35). The growers' official response was to form the Planters' Protective Association, whose goal was to counter the monopolization of tobacco-buying with a cartel of growers (Waldrep 46). They also formed the leadership of the Night Riders, a secret society of vigilantes whose mission was to enforce the pooling of tobacco by growers (Waldrep 79). The Night Riders attacked the infrastructure of the Tobacco cartel, but also burned homes and crops, and assaulted and in a few cases murdered individual farmers who refused to cooperate (Waldrep 84-85, 91, 100).

The *Appeal to Reason* ran two long articles on the Night Riders, both under the heading "Revolutionary Farmers" on October 8 and 29, 1908. For the second they sent a

staff investigative reporter, George S. Shoaf, to file a report from Kentucky. For the *Appeal*, and for socialists, especially those who were active in the Party, the Tobacco War was a challenging issue to navigate. The Kentucky farmers were in a sense on strike against the Trust for a liveable income (with or without the activity of the Night Riders), but their violent tactics could not be supported while remaining politically creditable. The Night Riders were not acting within any wider ideology or agenda. The belief among the farmers, many of whom were undeniably close to foreclosure and ruin, was that the ends justified the means. The means of the Night Riders in enforcing crop pooling, from a socialist point of view, were not fully defensible. The *Appeal* probably summed up the Socialist position in saying that:

Critics may condemn the Night Riders and association officials may denounce their depredations, but it is certain that had it not been for the demonstrations of violence, the subserviency of the farmers to the tobacco trust would have grown more and more degrading with every passing year. Socialists, of course, contend that the farmers should read Socialist literature, hear Socialist speeches, accept the Socialist philosophy, become class conscious, vote the Socialist ticket and inaugurate the Co-operative Commonwealth. In the absence of a knowledge of Socialism, however, the farmers were compelled to use means with which they were familiar. (“Revolutionary Farmers”)

While its sympathies were always with the working class (and poor farmers were regarded as working-class among socialists at the time) the paper did not conceal the brutal and often indiscriminate nature of the violence. The only rhetorical solution was to put the ultimate blame for the violence on the Tobacco trust, for being the originator of the situation. The hope was obviously that other farmers and workers would be inspired by the belligerence of the Kentucky tobacco farmers, and would channel that energy into an electoral solution: “It is conceded that many wage slaves in the cities,

though organized, lack backbone and the nerve necessary to successful resistance against the master class, but such cannot be said of the farmers of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia” (“Revolutionary Farmers”).

In this editorializing and in glorifying the Night Riders, the *Appeal* proceeded as far as it could. While it admitted that women and children had also been harmed (very much against the Socialist ethic and rhetoric, as we have seen) the *Appeal* was certainly telling the story of the Tobacco War from a subaltern position. Socialists, oppressed by the “master class,” were not threatened by such open revolt in the same way as the public projected by mainstream papers. At the same time, the violence could not be condoned, only excused – and the socialists followed their pattern of turning rhetorical attacks from elites back on themselves. In this case the *Appeal* reported on the chaos and violence almost as liberally as the *New York Times*, despite acknowledgement from both papers that local people downplayed the extent of the problem. However, while the discourse of the mainstream public strongly emphasized the “lawlessness” and criminality of the Night Riders, the socialists borrowed from the Night Riders themselves in expressing the disturbances in the language of war.

Of the two primary *Appeal* articles on the conflict, the first compares the conflict more strongly to war. Besides the main heading “Revolutionary Farmers” on both articles, the first also has the subheading “Both Sides Preparing for War.” The Riders called their daytime demonstrations – in which up to 25 000 people, many of them masked and on horseback, rode through towns – “peaceful armies of invasion” and the *Appeal* repeats this terminology. Militia were sent to Cynthiana, Kentucky, to prevent an “invasion” of the town, a “procession of planters invaded Hopkinsville from the north”

(“Both Sides Preparing for War”). The conflict was described as having “few parallels in the waging world-wide industrial war” (“Both Sides Preparing for War”). The second article, by George Shoaf, describes the conflict more as a strike, with a smaller headline reading “WHEN FARMERS WENT ON STRIKE,” but also speaks of “enlist(ing)” farmers, and a “battle royal.” The Shoaf article does more to downplay accusations of chaos and violence, but also directly takes on the mainstream preoccupation with “lawlessness.” The article enumerates changes to Kentucky law from supportive representatives that made the farmer’s strike more legitimate: “Laws were passed legalizing the farmers’ pool. The Claypool bill made it lawful for any number of persons to combine and pool their crops...Another bill, introduced by Representative Crecelius, was enacted into law which makes the unlawful sale of pooled products a misdemeanor” (“Revolutionary Farmers”). The trust eventually gave in to the price demands of the Tobacco Association, and “The surrender of the trust, no doubt, was hastened by the decision of the United States circuit court of New York, which declared the American Tobacco company a lawless institution” (“Revolutionary Farmers”).

The *Appeal*’s account of the tobacco conflict as a war or revolution, and turning the label of “lawless” away from the strikers and Night Riders and toward the tobacco trust, was in response to the mainstream narrative about the conflict, which displayed alarm about its criminality. Even when understanding of the dilemma the trust posed to farmers, the mainstream narrative placed law and order above all. The legality of the trust’s monopoly however, was not questioned in the context of the conflict. For comparison, we can look at coverage in the *New York Times* from the same time period. In the longest article on the conflict, an investigative piece, the main conclusion is that

“Crime is Breeding Crime in Kentucky” and that by creating a movement that disregards the law, the Night Riders had started a trend that threatened to break down all law and order in the area:

A love of mischief, too, has played its part, and the consequence is that all over the state personal feuds have sprung up, hatred has been engendered, the strong, bitter desire for vengeance has been aroused, and men have come to secretly plotting to burn and destroy and sometimes kill with no thought of the tobacco war in their minds, but ever remembering that the Night Riders were successful in evading the law. (“How Crime is Breeding Crime in Kentucky”)

A later article, from 1910, somewhat remarkably draws together the Night Riders, the mafia, lynching, and “very serious crimes...from the reckless handling of automobiles” under the title “UNPUNISHED CRIMES.” The piece, which quotes information from a Judge George C. Holt, begins by warning that up to 100 000 people who have participated in “lynchings” (it is unclear if this is meant in the modern sense of racially motivated murders or any extra-judicial killing) are still alive and unprosecuted. The second sentence continues by recounting in a similar way that up to 165 000 participants in labor disturbances are still at large.

A last comparison can be made between the two papers’ coverage of the killing of Hiram Hedges, a Kentucky tobacco farmer who refused to work within the pooling system. The *Times* reported it at the time, on 21 March 1908, as the “first murder” of the Kentucky Tobacco War. The *Appeal*, in its long recounting of the conflict in 1910, gives more space to his killing but does not at any point use the word “murder,” although it does relate (as the *Times* does not) that his wife and six children were put in danger by the gunshots. The section, recounting that night, which was an eventful one in the

conflict, ends with “Wherever the tobacco trust sought to crush the growers, fires blazed and blood flowed” (“Revolutionary Farmers”). While acknowledging violence, it is not connected with criminality, and the socialist version of the story was careful to put the ultimate blame on the tobacco trust.

Although the *Times* covered both the conviction of the American Cigar Leaf Tobacco Company as a trust and the actions of the Night Riders, it never did so in the same article and never made an explicit connection between the two cases. The two cases are mentioned in the same article only once, on May 11, 1911, in a list of active anti-trust court cases. A special investigation by the Department of Justice managed to convict eight Night Riders under the anti-trust act in April, 1911 for “combin(ing) to interfere with an inter-state shipment” (“Trust Suits Now Pending”).

2.4 The Story of Porfirio Diaz, Dictator

One more contrast in coverage can be seen in the *Appeal's* reporting on the rule of Porfirio Diaz, the President of Mexico from 1876 to 1911. In the lead-up to the Mexican Revolution of 1911, the *Appeal* covered the abuses of Diaz's regime heavily, as well as apparent efforts by the U.S. government to collude with the business-friendly Diaz in suppressing and extraditing political refugees active in the United States. The mainstream public was aware of the repressive nature of Diaz's rule, but saw it as necessary to modernize a primitive and backward country whose population, many of them Indigenous, did not care about or understand “democracy” as it was practiced in the United States. In this discourse, stability, modernity, and progress, which were

synonymous with the heavy American foreign investment courted during Diaz's rule, were of the upmost importance even when repression was necessary to impose them. Key to this outlook was a portrayal of everyday people in Mexico as fundamentally different, at the same time as Diaz's foreignness was downplayed. His heavy hand therefore, was the best option for a country that was "Still a Child" (Palmer).

Four 1909 articles in the *New York Times* illustrate these discourses. The longest article, "After Diaz, What?" lays this out fairly clearly. Although the author, who travelled to Mexico to interview Diaz and other officials, displays an amused skepticism of the President's grandiose claims, his autocracy, and even his corruption, are painted as benevolent: "Unlike Central American dictators, who go for the carving knife if there is a speck of gilt on the eggshell, Diaz nurses the goose and even feeds her a little gold dust by way of encouragement" ("After Diaz, What?"). His virtues are more important: "he has taught his army...that its loyalty is not to a person but to the constituted head of state; he has sought to make a nation of Mexico so ingrained with nationalism that it would not be dismembered; to hold the friendship of the United States..." ("After Diaz, What?") Later the author is even more frank about the reason that Diaz's stable --if unjust-- regime is worth its faults. An American businessman tells him, "Give us four or five years more of him...and I hope to be out of Mexico with my fortune" ("After Diaz, What?"). The mainstream public discourse is quite frank that Mexico under Diaz was set up to benefit American investors, but at the same time it tries to argue that his regime is for the good of Mexicans: "American critics of one-man power in Mexico forget that they come from a country where self-government has become second nature to a country where paternalism has been second nature equally long" and "The great

majority of Mexicans are too unintelligent to understand or consider such a thing as a fiscal policy” (“After Diaz, What?”).

A letter to the editor in the *New York Times* in July that year uses much the same language. Defending Diaz from an unnamed author’s accusations of repression and the jailing of critical journalists, Elisha Hollingsworth Talbot writes that Diaz has “established order where chaos had ruled,” and “supplanted commercial and industrial stagnation with a spirit of progress and material development” (Hollingsworth Talbot). Ordinary Mexicans are again portrayed as childlike (“he has taught them the advantages and obligations of the type of freedom that makes for good citizenship”) and primitive. Diaz was needed to enforce “obedience to the law and respect for the rights of property and the sacredness of human life” (Hollingsworth Talbot). The last article from December 5 of 1909 reassures readers that “LAWYERS, NOT ARMY, NOW RULE IN MEXICO: Diaz Has Laid Ground for a Quiet Succession When His Retirement Comes” and “American Influence Encouraged” (“Lawyers, Not Army”). Mexicans, again, are seen as fundamentally different from Americans, and the article warns against “putting weapons in the hands of a class peculiarly susceptible to the sophistries of the demagogue” (“Lawyers, Not Army”).

The editors of the *Appeal*, during the same period, were outraged that so little attention was being given to the repression, exploitation and suffering under Diaz, and saw in the tolerance of the American government and media the immoral influence of capital (“Massacres in Mexico”). As usual, however, their campaign functioned as a reaction to mainstream discourses about Mexico and Diaz, simultaneously showing a consciousness of the subaltern status of the socialist public and reversing, rather than

directly challenging, mainstream discourses. First, the *Appeal* rejected the image of Diaz as a modernizer, characterizing his rule as “barbarous” and medieval (“Diaz Desperados”). The benevolent and paternal image clearly grated on its editors: “And for permitting this and similar atrocities Dictator Diaz by American magazines and newspapers is pointed out as the “wisest modern ruler,” and the “one great man to be held up for the hero worship of mankind” (“Massacres in Mexico”). The exposure of the “fortress dungeons” at the San Juan de Ulua prison provided useful imagery for this, which is not to say that the reporting was not true (“International Criminal Conspiracy”). But just as the *Appeal* did not deny that Diaz’s Mexico had gained railways and public schools, the *New York Times* was unconcerned with conditions at the prison.

In mainstream public discourse, the assumed backwardness of Mexicans was taken as an excuse for authoritarian rule. For the socialists, it was Diaz and his supporters who were primitive: “not since man emerged from the savage state have such cruelties been perpetuated” (“Massacres in Mexico”). The medieval aspects of Mexico’s state and economy are also emphasized. Diaz, often called a statesman in the *Times* but rarely a dictator, is labeled a monarch in the *Appeal*. The page-long exposé “In the Mexican Political Prison” also situates Diaz’s Mexico as a throwback through the subheads “The Middle Ages Revived” and “Inferno Made Real” (“In the Mexican Political Prison”).

As well as this countering of the image of Diaz as a modernizer, which we can see was fairly conscious from the *Appeal*’s sarcastic quotation of mainstream writers, the paper sought to reverse the discourses that dehumanized most Mexicans in the mainstream public while humanizing Diaz. In the *Times*, Diaz’s impressive appearance

and charm are emphasized. He has a “Personal Appearance Most Favorable” and “in the street or in a car you would remark him as a man who, if he had not already fought his way to a place in the world, must have the capacity for it” (“After Diaz, What?”). The letter-writer in the *Times* argues that “Having personally known President Diaz...in no way and at no time...has he ever shown moral or physical cowardice, a “cold head,” or a “colder heart.” Exactly the opposite qualities are possessed by him in an unusual degree” (Hollingsworth Talbot).

Despite the prevailing racism and violence towards Native Americans, Diaz’s Indigenous heritage is also put to one side. Specifically in Diaz’s case, *Times* describes this heritage as a positive attribute: “He owes his good health to his Indian constitution and simple living,” “he is patriotic, not exotic” and his background gained support from him from Indigenous Mexicans. At the same time much of the othering of ordinary Mexicans in the *Times* seems connected to racial stereotyping. The *Appeal* takes on this narrative in its fight for justice in Mexico, but again shows little interest in introducing new ideas, terminology and discourses not specifically about Socialism. The battle in the language of the *Appeal* is to turn mainstream biases so that they are beneficial to the socialist public. In contrast to the gentlemanly Diaz written about in the *Times*, on February 27, 1909 in the same issue as the long exposé on the San Juan de Ulua prison, the *Appeal* has a short column on “The Motive of Diaz.” The writer, probably Fred Warren or another editor, argues that Diaz’s cruelty and despotism arise from an ancestral need for revenge, because Diaz is:

of the old Aztec stock...The descendants of the Spanish grandees of the old days are now the rebels and agitators whom Diaz is persecuting. The peon of

the present, whom Diaz is crushing beneath the heel of an alien capitalism, are descendants of the common soldiers who conquered the Aztecs and seized their country...Diaz has completely turned the tables, and with the Indian love of revenge, is giving the enemies of his race as hard a lot as they gave his ancestors. (“The Motive of Diaz”)

The *Appeal* here taps into a discourse about the “Indian” as an inhabitant of the past, in addition to many other stereotypes. However, the article is also quite inconsistent with the usual narrative of the paper about injustices in Mexico, which was that the capitalist greed of Mexican oligarchs and American investors was the cause. But in the context of prevailing discourses of the mainstream public, it worked well as vilification.

Accompanying this vilification was the humanization of Diaz’s political enemies, often called “patriots” and compared explicitly to heroes of the American Revolution. Speaking of political refugees from several countries including Mexico, the *Appeal* argues that “Magon, Villarreal, Rivera, Pouren and Rudowitz are patriots in the loftiest sense, doing, or trying to do, for their respective countries what the men of ’76 did for the American colonies. For this they deserve to be honored as men instead of being jailed as felons” (“Rescue the Refugees”). As discussed above, socialists saw themselves as finishing what the Revolutionary heroes had started, and so comparing foreign activists to them was a profound way to humanize them in the eyes of white, mid-and Southwestern American Socialists who lived in small towns and rural areas, and were likely to see foreigners as fundamentally different.

Just as being “Indian” was only a questionable quality when convenient in the *Times*, it was the same in the *Appeal*. In opposing the “Extermination of the Yaquis” of Mexico, the *Appeal* also felt it necessary to assure readers that the tribe did not fit stereotypes: “Contrary to the popular conception the Yaquis are not Indians according to

the common understanding of that term. They are patient, industrious, honest and brave people..." ("Massacres in Mexico"). *Changing* the popular conception was not the goal.

In its discourses around patriotism and Revolutionary War heroes, marriage, sexuality and family, as well as coverage of the Black Patch Tobacco War and Porfirio Diaz's rule in Mexico, we can see that the American Socialist public as expressed in the *Appeal to Reason* was oppositional, but also in many cases reinforced mainstream discourses by making use of them. Its discourses were not always admirable, by the standards of any time. It often sacrificed consistency for the sake of argument and fought its battles of language and discourse according to the principle of "by any means necessary." It seems that the socialist public did not aim to create transformative discourses around anything other than capitalism, socialism, profit, and property. This was enough to bar these texts and discourses, most of the time, from "respectable" and mainstream discussion and to give a subaltern status to members of the socialist public. However, the material above suggests that the American Socialist counterpublic would not have had the same kind of transformative effect on the subjectivity of its members as the counterpublics of identity that Michael Warner describes. The next chapter will explore this further by looking at the *Appeal to Reason's* format and mode of address to its readers.

Chapter 3 – American Socialists as a Proletarian Public Sphere

In Chapter Two we saw that the socialist counterpublic fulfilled Warner's prediction that the counterpublic exists in reaction to the mainstream public sphere, and draws its identity largely from it. However, a review of themes and coverage in the *Appeal* showed that in their discourses the American Socialists seemed to fall somewhat short of the transformational potential of the subaltern counterpublic of gender and sexuality that Warner describes. The extent to which the socialist counterpublic drew on mainstream discourses shows that it was, at the least, extreme for a counterpublic in projecting its membership outwards through the use of established language and narratives. Was there still a way for the American Socialist public to "transform the private lives" it mediated? (Warner 57). If, for example, "homosexuals exist in isolation; but gay people or queers exist by virtue of the world they elaborate together," did the American Socialist public transform isolated dissenters into a movement of people that had begun to understand themselves and the world differently, in a fundamental way (Warner 57)?

It could also be that Warner's work is largely inapplicable because the private lives and inner subjectivities of the members of the American Socialist public were essentially the same as those of the primary public sphere. However, while later scholars have added complexity to Habermas' picture of the bourgeois public sphere, none of those covered by this paper suggest that the mainstream public to which the Socialists opposed themselves was not still essentially bourgeois. This implies, as we have seen, a particular subjectivity based on the independence of private property and a sharp

contrast between the family and domestic sphere and everything outside it. For the working class, who largely constituted the American Socialist counterpublic, this kind of environment was not possible.

The discourses of the socialist public, seen through the *Appeal to Reason*, did not seem to be transformational in terms of identity. Those discourses that were specifically about identity, such as those around sexuality and family, served to reinforce an understanding of the individual derived from the bourgeois public sphere. According to Negt and Kluge, this would present a contradiction, since in the bourgeois public sphere the working class is blocked from perceiving its experiences as truly legitimate. Workers in an industrial setting do not experience privacy in the same way, since they are “absorbed by the context of capital,” nor do they own the significant property necessary to create a private family sphere (Negt and Kluge 14). For Negt and Kluge, only a proletarian public sphere could truly transform and empower the subjectivity of working-class people, by coming out of structures of production that empower workers, rather than the private family (28). This public sphere would be far more revolutionary in its ways of working than the American Socialist counterpublic. However, they do describe some practices that are more likely to open the possibility of legitimating workers’ experiences. The *Appeal* did engage in some fundamentally different means of production, meaning that as media of the American Socialist counterpublic it did to some extent provide a means of experiencing life and politics that was transformational.

For Negt and Kluge the media of the bourgeois or capitalist public sphere, like industrial production, is characterized by specialization, differentiation, and the dividing up of units of time (19, 24). In general, the way that life is experienced and mediated in

the bourgeois public sphere is “almost consistently analogous to genuinely existing commodity production” (Negt and Kluge 4). Other examples of this “industrial time scheme” would be “the mass media’s programming according to time slots and ... the division of educational processes into hour-long lessons” (Negt and Kluge 19). The worker’s life is also defined by many restrictions on physical movement (Negt and Kluge 29).

If the proletarian public sphere had a national newspaper like the *Appeal to Reason*, its structures would be extremely relevant: without a method of production significantly different from capitalist journals, it could not communicate to readers in a way that would be fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois media. This means not just the direct control that advertisers could exert on content, but the effects of the industrial production process on the experience of readers. Proletarian experience is “not based on control over products but upon the experience of production itself” (Negt and Kluge 128).

This ideal proletarian public sphere that Negt and Kluge describe, so intangible, and so necessarily separate from the experience of everyday life under capitalism, would seem to also be a public sphere without newspapers. Newspapers by definition segment and regiment time as well as information, and in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries required increasing amounts of capital and revenue to produce. Yet in their discussion of the proletarian public sphere of the English Labour Movement, Negt and Kluge place much importance on the movement’s “radical popular press” (190). This was a network of spaces and media such as “subscription clubs, reading rooms, reading clubs, and informal reading groups, for example, around workers reading aloud at work”

(190). The English Labour Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century is the closest example offered of a proletarian public sphere (187). In this section, Negt and Kluge elaborate on what the communications media of the proletarian public sphere would look like: “independent of commodity production, which in part integrates, refashions, and redirects elements of popular culture with a view to the constitution of the proletariat as a class” (188). Still, for Negt and Kluge, the proletarian public sphere is mostly unrealized. Nor do they describe the specifics of what it would look like: “We do not claim in our book to be able to say what the content of proletarian experience is” (xlvii-xlviii). What are more common are “rudimentary” working class organizations and publics focused on reaction and opposition, and “building external fronts” (32).

What this adds to Warner is an elaboration of the way that the working-class experience can have a similar role in personal subjectivity as gender or sexual orientation. It can not just govern political interaction, but explain the difference between a group of discontented wage earners and a movement that can transform consciousness. To find transformational potential in the *Appeal to Reason*, as one of the primary media voices of the working-class American Socialist counterpublic, we can look to see whether it was different from journals of the bourgeois, mainstream public sphere in its manner of production, organization and layout.

There were three aspects of the production of the *Appeal* that opened the possibility of an alternative form of mediated experience to that offered by newspapers of the mainstream public. The first was the extent of the paper’s reader-generated content. The second was the design and layout of the paper, which offered a much different, and somewhat less segmented and regimented reading experience than

comparable mainstream papers. The third was the way that the paper generated revenue, which had implications not just for its content, but for the way that readers experienced the paper, as a part of the counterpublic. However, the physical production process at the paper was very conventional, as other scholars have pointed out.

The *Appeal* gathered content from its readers in three main ways: by publishing reader letters regularly, by printing a weekly page of local party news, and by devoting a significant amount of space to news about subscription sales and acknowledgements to the highest sellers of the “Appeal Army.” Reader letters did not form any particular section, but they made up a regular part of the *Appeal*. Readers were depended on not just for support or to provide embellishment to the pages of the newspaper, but in large part for news and reporting as well. The paper began as almost a one-man operation and by 1909 had a few regular staff writers, including George Shoaf and Eugene Debs, but it was not a newsgathering operation in the same way as either the middle-class or tabloid papers of the same era (England 15). George Allan England, a socialist and the contemporary “biographer” of the *Appeal* wrote that, “The average paper knows little of the thoughts and life of its public. Not so, the APPEAL. Here, editors and subscribers are in constant touch; ideas and inspirations are being perpetually exchanged...no matter where wrong may be done to the workers, the echo of it always comes direct to the APPEAL. Be it a strike, an assault on the workers’ persons or on their rights, a legal outrage, what not, always the first instinct of the victims seems to be “TELL THE APPEAL!” (England 284-285). It was not just ordinary workers who wrote in with news, but more elite supporters: “One factor of tremendous strength in the work of the APPEAL Army is this: that members of it are to be found in the inmost citadels of “Big

Business” and the Government, and that nothing of importance, menacing the paper or the socialist cause, can be framed up, without details immediately reaching Girard” (England 285).

It is not always possible to determine the source of items in the paper. Short paragraphs are usually unattributed, unless the information is directly from another newspaper (as was also common). But of four sample issues from the beginning of 1909, (January to March), 11 paragraphs and articles seem to rely on information sent in from readers and non-staff informants. Often, the *Appeal* published stories of hardship. On January 16, 1909, the paper included a short item that “John Miller, 22 years old, walked from New York to Terre Haute, Ind. looking for work all the way, and failed to find it. The story of his suffering would melt a heart of stone” (“John Miller”). The paper did not have reporters all over the country to send in this type of story, so it seems that Miller or a friend must have wrote to the *Appeal* about it. On February 27, 1909 the paper observed that it received many more of these types of letters than it could print: “The mail of the Appeal is burdened with the cries of the distressed. The following are specimens of scores of similar letters:” along with a half column of reader letters (“Pathetic Pleas”). Also on January 16, 1909, the *Appeal* printed almost a full column inspired by a letter from a reader, who accused the establishment parties of voter suppression. Much of the reader’s letter is reprinted, along with some additional information (“The Uncounted Vote”). The “Tell the Appeal!” approach of which England boasts seems evident in the pieces of information that are forwarded from ordinary readers on to the newspaper. For example, a “game dealer of Tampico, Mexico” reported that he had “received an order for 500 humming birds, which are to be

served at a banquet to some rich Americans” or the reader who forwarded a letter he had received from the notably anti-labour President of the Buck Stove and Range Company (“A Game Dealer”; “A Few Words”). On March 20, 1909 the *Appeal* inserted a short item headed “Pinkertons Employed by the State of Alabama” which seems to also imply some local, or even civil servant, correspondent. The *Appeal* even printed suicide notes, for instance reporting on February 6, 1909 that “Miss Alice Law, an editor employed by a Chicago publishing firm, committed suicide a few days ago and from the letter she left behind we quote as follows” (“Too Near Starved”).

Throughout the study period, 1909-1911, readers received regional Socialist Party news on page three of the newspaper, taking from three columns to the entire page. The microfilm copies that are a source for this work contain the “Southwest edition,” covering the states of Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. This was also the region where the *Appeal* was most successful, since in large cities it faced more competition from non-English language and immigrant radical newspapers (Green 11). Presumably most of the other regions served by the *Appeal* had some kind of local edition, but further information on this is not available without archival research. None of the Southwest edition is written by *Appeal* staff: material is all sent on from the state secretaries for the Party. A notice in the May 14, 1910 issue illustrates some of the editorial process for that edition:

Do not send notices intended for the Southwest edition to the Appeal. Send them to the state secretary of your state. The Appeal has printed stuff sent to it which caused trouble and will hereafter pay no attention to matter sent direct to it. Remember, the state secretary is editor of his department, and he must pass on what appears in this column. (“Don’t Send to the Appeal”)

From this we can see that none of the regional-edition material was written by professional journalists, but also that the process of gathering local news was still hierarchical, and also closely linked the paper and the Party, although no formal tie ever existed (Ruff 128). Although filtered through Party officials, this section also contained the liveliest debate, taking place as notices and resolutions from one local to another. Some other contents of the May 14th edition, which are typical, are financial statements for Oklahoma, a lecture on voting socialist from the Secretary for Kansas, and a report on a speaking tour from Missouri. Texas sent in over a dozen short items on the accomplishments of individual members and locals:

Reddin Andrew is doing great work in the rural communities of Grayson county...Local organized at Ell, the first in Hall county...M.A. Drinkard, of Snyder an old worker, writes that he will begin on the 13th to organize Scurry county, revive dead locals and start new ones...Have you nominated that county chairman?...We must try to have a candidate for Congress in each district...("Lone Star Flashes")

It is easy to see how the *Appeal* acted as a busy hub for members of the American Socialist public, down to an extremely local scale. Small-town party chapters of a few dozen members could still have access to an audience of hundreds of thousands at the same time as they communicated small-scale, often mundane, business. The regional editions also contributed another somewhat chaotic element to the design of the newspaper, since the contents and format of the news was to some degree up to the quirks of the State Secretaries. In the above example we can see the differences in how each state official preferred to use his/her space: some with speechmaking, some with minute individual notices, some with a column of figures. This would of course also

change according to need, but as a result of its audience-derived content, the Southwest edition was always a comparatively erratic and unpredictable reading experience.

Members of the socialist counterpublic *were* the news in the Southwest edition, but also whenever the *Appeal* reported on its own subscription success or failure – and almost every issue contained at least one column devoted just to printing detailed circulation numbers by state (including how many “on” – new subscriptions – and “off” – expired subscriptions that were not renewed), sometimes on the front page. There was also a periodic item called “The Big Ten” that listed top subscription-sellers (cf. February 6, 1909, p. 3; September 25, 1909, p. 3) as well as subscribers to special initiatives like the “Democratic Editors Fund” (cf. February 27, 1909, p. 5). Material also came from readers in the form of questions about Socialism that were answered by the editors, which also appeared sporadically under headings such as “Question Box” (January 16, 1909) or “Just for the Asking” (February 27, 1909). Comments from readers about campaigns of the paper were often published: for instance in November 1909 the paper started to publish specific information on postmasters who were accused of interfering with its delivery. The messages of postmasters to the newspaper were paired with letters from the person whose subscription was affected, to point out that the postmasters were dishonestly targeting the *Appeal*. Each time, the paper devotes almost an entire column to publishing this correspondence, in order to make its case.

Other reader content – or coverage of readers by the newspaper – was less quantitative. On July 24, 1909 a paragraph was given over to reader’s orders for and feedback on the “Arsenal of Facts,” a propaganda booklet that the paper offered free with multiple subscriptions: “Dear Comrade: You asked me to write you my opinion of

the Arsenal of Facts. As I am a slave and work eleven hours a day for a company that hardly knows when a man has done a day's work, I haven't had time to memorize but little of the facts contained in the wonderful little book, but I have examined it enough to see it is the finest thing I ever had..." ("How They Like "The Arsenal"). As already mentioned, two columns of the July 3, 1909 issue were filled with messages from readers pledging their support to Fred Warren, the editor's, legal defense fund ("The Army Stands By Warren"). Again on August 14, 1909, the paper gave almost three columns of the last page to letters from readers: "Warren's speech has made several Socialists here already. Would like to serve his sentence for him, but since that is impossible will try and send you subs every week until we get this rotten system knocked out and Socialism in full sway. – Link, Ronceverte, W. Va." ("Stirring Words from Appeal Readers"). In all, most of the sample issues for 1909 (one every three weeks) contained some reader content of this kind, in addition to the list of subscribers by state. However, the type, quantity and location of this kind of material was highly variable, and seemed to depend on the space available as well as the state of subscription sales. For instance, of the two times that the paper printed the "Big Ten" list in the sample issues, in the September 25 issue, on the next page is an item on "Circulation Troubles" ("Circulation Troubles"). Reader tips and letters, and the small-scale Socialist Party business of the regional editions, generated a significant portion of the content for the *Appeal* in a non-commercial fashion that strengthened the networks of communication in the American Socialist public.

The design and layout of the *Appeal* offered a different, more proletarian reading experience to American Socialists when they opened their national paper. In terms of

experience, the design of a newspaper can be just as important as its discourses. Negt and Kluge speculate on how the format of German television at the time they wrote reinforced a non-proletarian worldview, but others have explored the format of newspapers. In *The Form of News*, Barnhurst and Nerone argue that the visible organization, such as layout and design, typography, illustration, “genres of reportage” and departmentalization of the newspaper creates an environment that readers are immersed in. This form also “embodies the imagined relationship of a medium to its society and polity” (Barnhurst and Nerone 3).

A careful study of form can show how readers are positioned by the newspaper, as well as the nature of the relationship between the body of readers and the publication (Barnhurst and Nerone 3-5). For example, numerous aspects of the design of early American newspapers marked them out as the literary, non-commercial space of elite critical citizens that Habermas describes. These early newspapers did not strive to please or even address a wide, general audience. News items were usually unexplained and unmediated; speeches and documents were reprinted with the assumption that readers would not need further background information (Barnhurst and Nerone 32). The layout of the paper did not put major items on the front page, or indeed in any particular order, because subscribers could be relied on to read the entire publication (Barnhurst and Nerone 40). The overall visual effect was “bookish,” and meant to convey an impression of durability (Barnhurst and Nerone 39, 105). Readers were not regarded as consumers to the same extent, even of the publication itself: the newspaper was designed to be less disposable, the publisher expecting that it would be passed among several readers (Barnhurst and Nerone 105).

As their audience became wider, later in the nineteenth century newspapers moved towards more elaborate and visual presentation, influenced by the advertisements that were becoming increasingly important (Barnhurst and Nerone 61). More quantitative ways of presenting information, and differentiation between sections developed as different categories of readers were targeted, as a market, in the same newspaper (Barnhurst and Nerone 72-73). The Victorian newspaper was denser and longer in order to accommodate advertisements and the more extensive and diverse demands of the audience (Barnhurst and Nerone 81-84). At the same time it was flimsier, more decorative, and lacking in the open white spaces that had invited leisure and reflection (Barnhurst and Nerone 93). Barnhurst and Nerone are not mapping a class divide in the design of periodicals, but rather one between mass media and the more artisanal journals that preceded them. However, their methods of measuring how an industrial, capitalist production process and revenue model manifested itself in the design and layout of newspapers is applicable. The *Appeal to Reason*, as a working-class rather than bourgeois publication, does not fall clearly into their categories. However, it exhibits many design aspects of the early, artisanal newspaper rather than the heavily capitalized “Victorian” newspapers that it was contemporary with – although the actual scale and process of the paper’s production was not at all artisanal.

Aside from the page of local news, there was no regular division of sections within the *Appeal*. As we have seen, even the length of the Southwest edition or other seemingly regular features, like the “Question Box,” was haphazard and seemed to depend on the impact of outside political and social developments – such as listing the “Big Ten” subscription sellers when circulation was down. The listing of circulation by

state, one of the most regular features of the paper, moved between the front page and the back page from week to week. Unlike very early newspapers, the biggest news was on the front page as expected, but fiction, aphorisms, quotations, investigative reporting, letters to the editor and paragraphs of news were essentially jumbled together. From this we can see that although the *Appeal* carried advertisements of some kind most of the time, the convenience of advertisers was not being consulted to the point of segmenting the audience of the paper into interest groups, or changing the design in any way except to make room for the copy. The haphazard and flexible design also indicates that individual whims and immediate circumstances among the editorial direction of the paper had much more influence than at mainstream papers being published at the same time.

The content and design of the *Appeal* was also characterized by a need for readers to pay relatively close attention. Although the *Appeal* sometimes used large headlines and put its biggest stories on the front page, its otherwise irregular format meant that the paper required full attention and could not be skimmed. As Barnhurst and Nerone predict of less capitalized newspapers, the *Appeal* often published source material such as government reports or official letters in whole. All newspapers at this time were more cramped than today, but the layout of the *Appeal* was comparatively hard to browse. The *New York Times* in the same time period was, like the *Appeal*, seven columns per page, with a similar size of type, but column headings were larger, and articles were more regular in size. The *Appeal* often did not even attach headings to its articles. By contrast even inch-long items in the *New York Times* usually had a title in larger type. Taking the *New York Times* of March 1, 1909 as an example, we can see these contrasts in more

detail. Although much longer than the *Appeal* at sixteen pages, it was divided into sections to a much greater extent. Athletic news, odd stories and trivia, financial news and stock and bond listings, and classifieds all had their own pages. The page location of these sections was also fairly stable: on both March 1 and March 15, for example, athletic news was on page seven, financial news was on pages ten through thirteen, and classifieds were on pages fourteen and fifteen.

Intertextuality is another feature that Barnhurst and Nerone find in earlier, less capitalized newspapers (34-35). The colonial newspaper, printed on a small scale by skilled artisans and aimed at an elite and well-informed public of officials and educated “gentlemen,” was “obscure” and “unintelligible” without extensive prior knowledge of local issues (Barnhurst and Nerone 32-35, 36-37). The *Appeal* was intertextual compared to mainstream papers in that it expected readers to remember items and discourses from previous issues. This was evident, for example, in the 1909 trial of Fred Warren, the editor of the *Appeal*. The paper’s updates on his trial often assumed significant previous knowledge of the case. On May 1, 1909 the *Appeal* reminds readers that the case has been in progress for two years, but does not recount what the case against him is about. It calls the case a politically motivated reprisal for the *Appeal*’s defense of Moyer and Haywood, assuming that the audience knows who these two men are. They were fairly well known labour activists, but a more mainstream public would not have been automatically familiar with the names and the circumstances of their conflict with the government (“Once More Into Court,” “Warren Convicted”). The *New York Times* largely conformed to Barnhurst and Nerone’s “Victorian newspaper,” with fewer intertextual references, more clearly segmented sections to accommodate

advertisers, and a layout that required less sustained attention. This shows that the *Appeal* provided members of the socialist public with a reading experience that was alternative to the dominant public.

Negt and Kluge's analysis of the importance of the structure of production of media is similar to work that seeks to define alternative media. Since these authors provide greater specificity on what a genuinely non-bourgeois newspaper would look like than Negt and Kluge offer, they must be taken into account. The *Appeal's* circulation-centric, self-promotional business practices actually served to make it more like the media of the proletarian public sphere that Negt and Kluge describe, but it is necessary to address some criticism of these practices. Elliot Shore, the author of *Talkin' Socialism: J.A. Wayland and the role of the press in American radicalism, 1890-1912* linked the *Appeal's* focus on increasing circulation, and its associated self-promotion, with a business strategy that relied on advertising (Shore, *Talkin' Socialism* 103-104). Shore argues that the pursuit of circulation "altered the content of the newspaper and its influence on socialism" especially by leading the paper to overhype stories (Shore, "Selling Socialism" 147, 165). He characterizes the various methods of the newspaper to gain more subscriptions to those of tabloids like the *New York World*, "that had attended and abetted the Spanish-American-Philippine war" (Shore 154). The pursuit of circulation, in this reading, can only have corrupting effects on the content and influence of a radical paper. In fact, the *Appeal's* business strategy, while it aimed at high circulation, contributed an alternative reading experience and strengthened the networks of the American Socialist public.

The *Appeal* certainly did put a huge emphasis, both in its content and economics, on high circulation, but this did not mean that it operated in the same way as a mass-circulation tabloid. The hallmark of such mass media, according to Negt and Kluge, is that communication flows in only one direction (Negt and Kluge 99-100). We have already seen that the *Appeal* received and often published a great deal of communication from its readers. Shore also misses the way that the paper's self-promotion and circulation built up and gave structure to the American Socialist public, in addition to keeping the *Appeal* solvent. The "Appeal Army" of volunteer subscription sellers and activists, which formed the foundation for the *Appeal's* distribution system, was a brilliant strategy for staying in business, but no mass circulation tabloid could have put together such a force. This was especially important because so many subscribers lived in rural areas, and so the primary way that the paper reached new readers was through word of mouth and the delivery of free or used copies by volunteers. On the front page of one issue, two typical reminders read: "Did you overlook the Barber Shop last week? Please see that your barber is on the Appeal list. In this way we will reach thousands of new people with a few copies of the paper" and "I will mail copies of the Liberty Edition at the rate of one-half cent per copy where fifty or more are sent in at one time. Make up a list of fifty names and let's see what we can do" ("Did you overlook"; "I will mail copies").

The members of the Appeal Army, numbering over 50 000 during the 1909-1912 time period, were motivated by their belief in Socialism, and by their conviction that the *Appeal to Reason* was one of the best ways of spreading their message and creating public pressure on the government and courts (England 70). The Army was no gimmick

– it was able to distribute 3.1 million copies of the special edition printed for the Moyer-Haywood trial and to boost circulation by tens of thousands of issues when it seemed urgent to do so (Grace Brewer qtd. in England 71; England 73). In 1903 the U.S. Post Office tried to revoke the paper's second-class mail permit, which allowed it to send out copies at special rates reserved for publications (England 83). The Post Office demanded that the *Appeal* prove within ten days that subscribers had paid for papers with their own money, and in eight days sixty-eight thousand subscribers had sent their signatures by mail (Graham 8). This was a level of engagement and reliance on the readership of the publication that was fundamentally different from that of mass-media newspapers, even if the economic pressure to maintain a high subscription base was the same.

Shore also assumes that the *Appeal* was like mass-circulation tabloids in aiming at high circulation in order to make the paper attractive to advertisers. As we have seen, high circulation also fit with the paper's self-understood propaganda mission, as well as the need to have a large and loyal audience to ward off attempts to suppress the paper. Advertisers, also, were less important to the newspaper economically than Shore argues. Actual business accounts are not available, but we can make some informed guesses about the importance of advertising revenue to the *Appeal* in the 1909-1912 period. Although circumstances might have been different in the newspaper's earlier periods, this was the heyday of its circulation. At no point did the paper print advertising from large companies. This may have been simply because they were uninterested, but the patent-medicine and real-estate companies that often placed ads, while unsavoury, were

probably too small to pay very large amounts, and therefore have much influence over the paper's editors.

If advertising held significant financial sway at the *Appeal*, it would not have been possible for the paper to be printed free of advertising, as it sometimes was. Between January and September 1910, no ads appeared in the paper except for the *Appeal*'s own books and pamphlets. On January 29, 1910 the editor inserted a note to readers that

This issue completes the first month of the "No-Commercial-Advertising" plan. At this writing (Jan 22nd), I cannot give complete report of the month's business. I can say, however, that the result has been fully up to our expectations. For the twenty days of January we received 38,860 subscribers, an average of 1,943 per day. If we can keep up this gait the *Appeal* can make both ends meet without trouble. The only cloud on the sky is the advance in the cost of white paper and Mr. Taft's proposed increase in the postage rates. The Army is finding, as I anticipated, that it is much easier to get subs for the *Appeal* under the new policy than before. ("No Advertising")

Advertising appeared again in September 1910, but this time as single columns in the back three pages, and it was never again as obtrusive as it had been previously, when ads over multiple columns, or even full-page ads with personal recommendations from the *Appeal*'s advertising officer, often appeared. Also, special editions were still printed without ads, for example, on March 4, 1911 when the *Appeal* printed reports on three cities where the socialist vote was high.

Contrary to Shore's analysis, we can see that the *Appeal*'s constant drive for high circulation and strategies to increase it, (most notably through the Appeal Army), while a business imperative, also created structures and multi-directional communication links within the American Socialist public. Nor was the pursuit of circulation linked primarily to a great reliance on advertisers who might compromise

the paper's message. It was subscription fees themselves that covered most costs, and the motivation to add subscribers can be attributed to the usual pressures of fixed costs and increasing discounts for larger purchases of paper and other inputs. Shore equates high circulation with a corruption of the radical message, but this was not evident in the *Appeal's* business strategy. For Negt and Kluge, what is important is that media are produced and delivered in a way that can offer an alternative experience to the reader. In some ways, this was true of the *Appeal*: being a reader meant not just paying for a subscription but becoming part of a community of activists that took responsibility for the health and survival of the paper.

Radical papers at the turn of the century -- along with other periods -- have been critiqued as being too mainstream to effect real change, and for conforming too closely to hierarchical, capitalist methods of production (Hamilton 366-367). For theorists of alternative media such as Hamilton, (in line with Negt and Kluge), it is the structure of production, such as where financing comes from, who writes, how subject matter is chosen, and the capital-intensity of the operation, that determine the alternativeness of the media, not simply oppositional content. Hamilton critiques the *Appeal to Reason* in particular for attempting a top-down, instructional publication "conceiving a 'mass' basis for popular social movement -- and what some have called the arrogance of attempting to do so" (Hamilton 376). In its capitalization and production methods the *Appeal* does fall far short of what Negt and Kluge would require for a medium of the proletarian public sphere.

The *Appeal's* physical production processes and organization of workers were little different from any other newspaper of comparable size. To print ever-growing

editions of hundreds of thousands of copies each week, it had to invest in state-of-the-art printing presses (England 271). The huge organizational requirements of printing and distributing the paper, as well as managing subscriptions and correspondence, led to a conventional division of labour along industrial lines. England gives a picture of the *Appeal* offices and plant in his book: “The mechanical equipment is equal to any emergency. In addition to a battery of linotypes and a complete stereotyping plant, the APPEAL has many job-presses, binders and so on, a telephone switch-board of its own and one of the largest three-deck straight-line Goss perfecting presses in the country” (271). One man had to continually stand by the machine to monitor it, others had the task of carrying away the finished papers from the machine (England 271).

England goes on to describe the elaborate system needed for filing information and labeling and addressing papers, and notes admiringly that “The whole operation of the plant is wonderfully systematized, organized and operated, to eliminate wastes of time and energy and get the greatest results for the least outlay of human labor possible, in forwarding the Revolution” (273). Like any normal early twentieth-century American, England found the technology and huge production capacity at the *Appeal* plant thrilling, a victory showing that socialists could do whatever capitalists could. Yet there is an element of Debord’s spectacle (1967) in this, as there was for readers of the *Appeal*. There was a sense that the huge print runs and subscription base, and the look and feel of a paper printed with hugely expensive and advanced equipment, formed part of the attraction of the paper for members of the American Socialist public. For George Allan England, and likely for many others, an important part of the experience of consuming the *Appeal* was that it was a socialist newspaper that could beat the

capitalists at their own game. This must have been satisfying, but the industrial methods of the socialists' national weekly was weakening its ability to act as a proletarian public sphere. Negt and Kluge find that the way media is produced can contribute intangibly but significantly to its emancipatory potential, and while in other ways the *Appeal* was produced and delivered its content in ways that offered an alternative to media of industrial capitalism, its physical production behind the scenes was conventional.

In this chapter, we have moved from analyzing the themes and discourses in the *Appeal* to learn about the nature of the American Socialist public, to looking at the paper's methods of production and distribution. Since Michael Warner does not provide a theoretical framework for this we turned to Negt and Kluge, who work to expand on Habermas' idea of the proletarian public sphere. Although they do not provide much in the way of concrete examples, applying their work to the *Appeal* illustrates the messy reality of what media of the proletarian public sphere might look like in practice. They predict that practitioners of this media would build communication networks within the public, while finding new ways of presentation and production that would avoid the regimentation, segmentation, and isolation of bourgeois or mass media. The *Appeal's* practice of relying heavily on readers for content fits with this model, as it reinforced the communication of information in both directions, in contrast with mass media, and offered more horizontal communication than media of the bourgeois public. The design and layout of the *Appeal*, while still following the main conventions of a newspaper, did create a less rationalized and segmented reading experience than mainstream newspapers. And the *Appeal's* revenue model, while it necessitated some features of a mass-circulation newspaper, kept it relatively independent from large corporations and

further strengthened networks within the American Socialist public. However, it is undeniable that behind the scenes the physical newspaper, apart from its content, was created in a highly industrial manner. Therefore, the *Appeal to Reason* fulfilled some of the potential that Negt and Kluge envision for media of the proletarian public sphere. Although the paper still relied on industrial, hierarchical production, for the audience the experience of reading the *Appeal* allowed them to form self-identity and types of experience outside of the limitations that life within the bourgeois public sphere posed for them. Since the *Appeal* was one of the primary forms of media for the American Socialist counterpublic, this may explain some of the tenacity of its members, and its brief period of strength.

Conclusion

The initial impetus for this study was the basic strangeness of the *Appeal to Reason* in light of the fairly shallow picture of pre-War American (or North American) political life generally held in contemporary culture. Part of this effect comes from a scholarly history, influencing mainstream perceptions, which divides newspapers at this time into two general groups: a low-substance, sensational press for the lower classes and an informational press for the upper classes. However, historians of radical journalism have also been dismissive of the *Appeal* and its influence, because its features did not fit with accepted definitions of alternative or radical media. When the *Appeal* has been studied by a few scholars, its textual content and the information it has to offer about pre-War American Socialism has been neglected. Similarly, while the *Appeal's* business practices have been accurately critiqued as hierarchical, they have been described without much nuance, with the result that important differences from mainstream capitalist newspapers are forgotten. The existence for twenty-seven years of a national newspaper with hundreds of thousands of subscribers, written by and for American Socialists, and that weathered countless external attacks cannot have been insignificant. Sometimes, popularity matters. By looking at the *Appeal* from the perspective of its place within the American Socialist counterpublic, its distinctive features are brought back into focus, and its strangeness becomes explicable as the expression of a distinctive, oppositional counterpublic.

The American Socialist public as expressed through the *Appeal to Reason* did function as a counterpublic according to both Michael Warner's definition and that of

Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, but with significant omissions that detracted from the ability of its members to create the subjective foundations for a sustainable and independent movement. This somewhat ambiguous conclusion comes as a result of starting the research process with a cultural artifact in need of explanation, rather than a theory in need of support. Applying existing theories to an already-chosen publication is considerably messier than the selected examples that Warner or Negt and Kluge bring into their work, but serves to test these theories and bring a new perspective to an overlooked part of journalism history.

The discourses that circulated in the *Appeal to Reason* fulfilled many of Warner's predictions for the type of language and worldview that would form in a counterpublic. The discourses reviewed in Chapter Two incorporate an awareness of the subaltern status of members of the counterpublic through their oppositional interpretation of contemporary issues and events, and reliance on different assumptions about the experiences and worldview of the audience. For example, it was taken for granted in the *Appeal* that the audience would also assume that it was the wealthy who held a parasitic role in society, since the members of the American Socialist public shared an interpretation of the economic system that regarded privately-held capital as appropriated from labour. However, unlike the counterpublics that Warner describes in more detail, the American Socialist counterpublic was not able to carry this project out fully. Instead, it not only left many assumptions of the mainstream public unchallenged, but uncritically used mainstream cultural prejudices to defend socialist positions. Therefore, while the discourses that are evident in the *Appeal* established new ways for socialists to speak and think about social issues, and to defend their beliefs against

external attacks, they did so solely from a defensive position. This served to reinforce the dominant public, by allowing its ideology to remain as a reference point, rather than engaging fully in the “worldmaking” that counterpublics have the potential to foster. In this we can see the counterproductive potential of another feature of the public that Warner describes: since the audience of a public or counterpublic is imagined and indefinite, discourses will naturally be addressed to an ever-widening group of potential audience members. For those creating and circulating discourses within a political counterpublic, this natural drift can become self-defeating, as the drive to gain members and power leads the counterpublic to incorporate itself back into the dominant political public. The *Appeal to Reason* shows that the discourses of a political counterpublic whose members aspire to become part of the dominant public may be aimed at non-members, at the expense of creating emancipatory language and ideas for existing members.

In the area of discourse, the American Socialists were only partially successful in creating a counterpublic that could establish an independent basis for understanding and speaking about the world they inhabited. However, while Warner focuses on discourse in his work, Negt and Kluge show that the way media are produced can be equally important in determining whether the members of the public that reads (or watches) it is able to create a field of action and speech that is actually liberated from the dominant public. According to the work of these two theorists, media produced by a proletarian public sphere can offer a new form of experience and understanding through the way it engages with the audience. Chapter Three also draws on Barnhurst and Nerone to clarify how the layout of a newspaper can vary according to the purpose and background of the

publication. Negt and Kluge find that in order to avoid perpetuating dominant capitalist forms of experience, media of a proletarian public sphere must have a more horizontal mode of production that allows the audience to have input in content, and be organized and presented in a more organic, less segmented and systematized way than media that are produced by large capitalist organizations for mass audiences of the dominant public. Chapter Three confirms that the *Appeal* did have a hierarchical, industrially-organized process of production, but also finds that in the areas of content and revenue generation, design, and layout, the production practices of the paper were actually quite different from a mainstream capitalist paper and in line with what Negt and Kluge describe.

Scholars of alternative media such as Shore (1985) and Hamilton (2000) have tried to connect the *Appeal's* hierarchical features with its eventual failure. Shore writes that “the experiences of the *Appeal* suggest that adopting the techniques of the mainstream press might increase circulation but may eventually destroy the effectiveness of the radical media in the U.S.” (Shore, “Selling Socialism” 166). However, his two main examples of “techniques of the mainstream press” are prize offers for subscriptions, which was a minor aspect of the *Appeal's* efforts to build its audience, and the Appeal Army, which as we have seen was actually one of the most important alternative features of the paper. Overall, as we have seen, Shore’s attempt to draw a straight line from the *Appeal's* goal of high circulation to subservience to advertising, to eventual failure is too simplistic (Shore, *Talkin’ Socialism* 359-360). Similarly, Hamilton assumes that a mass circulation and reliance on advertising go hand in hand, without considering the possibility that under some economic conditions, a

subscription-based model could be successful for large publications. He advocates radically small-scale and low-capital forms of communication to enhance participation in media and avoid these pitfalls” because “What matters to political movements today is how alternative media are organized and how they might organize social movements through innovations in cultural form” (371-372, 373). He also quotes Shore’s work on the *Appeal* as an example, and also links the eventual shutdown of the *Appeal* to its size, because this made it more vulnerable to repression (366). However, the *Appeal* was targeted for repression several times before World War I, and each time these efforts failed (England 1917). It was *Appeal*’s place in the Socialist public that protected it for so long, and its size and business practices that strengthened networks of active members contributed to the creation of this public. The American Socialist public as a whole was greatly weakened by social changes and repression that took place prior to the United States’ entry into the war. Therefore it seems that looking for internal explanations for the end of a twenty-seven year old newspaper – a very respectable age for an American alternative publication – is unproductive. An area of further study that seems more promising would be to investigate the American Socialists as a public, rather than a political party only, and to seek explanations for their decline from a public-sphere perspective.

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