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Kim Voss

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**Author:**

[Voss, Kim](#), University of California, Berkeley

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Disposition is Not Action:  
The Rise and Demise of the Knights of Labor

Kim Voss

University of California, Berkeley

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I. Introduction

- A. The Knights in Comparative Perspective
- B. Why Did the Knights Collapse? Explanations and Agendas

II. A Quantitative Exploration of the Knights' Collapse

- A. Details of the Analysis
- B. The Failure of Skilled Local Assemblies
- C. The Failure of Less-Skilled Locals
- D. The Knights, Employers' Associations, and the State

III. The Knights and the Manufacturers: A Brief Exploration of the 1887 Lock-out of the Leather Workers in Newark, New Jersey

- A. Leather and Labor in Newark
- B. The Lock-out of 1887
- C. Working-Class Republicanism and the Collapse of the Knights

IV. Conclusion

## Introduction

Recent theoretical and historical studies of working class formation have raised important doubts about standard interpretations of the American working class. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the renewed debate over "American exceptionalism", that unexpected combination of political conservatism and weak working class institutions in the nation that underwent the modern world's first democratic revolution. Once it was popular to argue that American workers felt no need for collective action, either because of a classlessness that was firmly rooted in the psyche of the first new nation, or an innate job consciousness that was able to attain full flowering only in the United States, that most bourgeois of countries. But two decades of social history have documented such a rich diversity of militant working class activity that such explanations are now rarely invoked.

In place of the old orthodoxy, a new generation of labor historians have begun to fashion a "Thompsonian history of the American working class", one that attempts to demonstrate "a history of class consciousness in the United States comparable to that of working-class movements in Britain and on the Continent."<sup>1</sup> For these labor historians the rhetoric of working-class republicanism lies at the heart of the numerous instances, uncovered in recent social history, of American workers expressing opinions or acting collectively in ways that rival their supposedly more class-conscious European colleagues.<sup>2</sup> Working in this framework, they have reinterpreted everything from seemingly narrow wage demands to debates over public parks and drinking practices as actually a class-conscious attempt by workers to recapture control over their labor and their republic.<sup>3</sup>

In a curious way this work runs the risk of reproducing, albeit inversely, the fallacious reasoning of the earlier work on American exceptionalism. The problem with the early arguments about classlessness or job consciousness is the assumption that we can read backwards from a lack of successful working class collective action to a lack of interest in such action on the part of American workers. Nowhere does this literature show a recognition of the reality that disposition is not action, that groups who share motivational constructs or dispositions to behave in certain ways will not automatically find ways to transform these dispositions into behavior. The mistake, in other words, is the use of radical institutions (or the lack thereof) as an index of class consciousness. The new labor historians, in contrast, turn this mode of reasoning on its head. They seem to be arguing that uncovering an oppositional consciousness is as good as having found the radical institutions, or, to put it another way, that then we have uncovered a class conscious American working class that rivals that of continental Europe. To the extent that such arguments represent a rejection of teleological assumptions about all capitalist societies pass

through the same historical stages, they are a welcome departure from much of the work on the American working class. But to the extent that they invite us to put aside our investigations once we have uncovered oppositional consciousness or behavior, it distracts us from asking about the mechanisms by which a sometimes radical disposition was transformed into meek or non-existent action.

Such questions can best be answered, I think, by conceptualizing class formation as a social movement. Those who investigate social movements pay careful attention to the several steps that intervene between disposition and action, and adopting their analytical insights provides a way of developing an improved, historically sensitive explanation for the shape of the American working class. In minimalist outline, we need to recognize that it is through organization and mobilization that people constitute themselves as a class. This means that the factors that lead people to see the world in class terms may not be the same as those that sustain organizations created to act on such a vision; and we need to investigate the conditions which encourage both the world view and organizational longevity in critical moments of labor movement development. Secondly, we need to attend to the interaction between ideology and organizational development. One thing that a social movement organization does, as Scott McNall points out, is to explain past failures, current defeats and possible futures; the explanations offered affect members' tactics as well as the growth of the organization.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the rapidity of organizational growth feeds back on this process, affecting both solidarity and commitment. Finally, just as protesters' actions do not determine the outcome of a social movement, workers are not the only participants in the process of class formation: employers and the state play an equally important role in shaping the labor movement.

This paper uses a social movement approach to analyze the rise and demise of the Knights of Labor, America's first mass-based working class organization. This case is of particular interest because it presents analytical problems for both older proponents of American exceptionalism and the newer labor historians who emphasize the class-consciousness of American workers. For those who view American workers as classless or job conscious, the Knights' success in organizing broad sectors of the labor force, and the explicitly class-type arguments stressed in the Order's constitutional preamble, are anomalies that must either be ignored or explained away. This is commonly done by exaggerating the shallowness of the Knights' appeal or by emphasizing their evanescence.<sup>5</sup> For the newer labor historians, the Knights' success provides obvious evidence for their view of American workers as class-conscious, but here the analytical difficulty is the Knights collapse. If the American worker was sympathetic to class appeals, why did the Knights fail?

Taking seriously the distinction between disposition and action, this paper provides an explanation of the Knights collapse which recognizes both the class-consciousness of its appeal and the inability of its members to sustain local organizations initiated as an expression of that class-consciousness. It proceeds as follows: The next section

provides some background on the Knights. It begins by discussing the comparative context and then provides a short account of the Knights' growth and ideology. The third section takes up the issue of the Knights' decline, briefly discussing the differing explanations for the Order's collapse. The fourth and fifth sections report on two statistical studies of the Knights' collapse in New Jersey, one which focuses on the demise of skilled locals and the other which concentrates on the failure of less-skilled locals. Both studies highlight the destructive impact of employers' associations, a issue that is pursued in the sixth section where evidence on the relative strength of American, French and English employers' associations is considered. Concluding that American employers' associations were stronger, but that this alone is an unsatisfying explanation for the Knights' failure, the seventh section examines the relationship between workers' organization, Knights' ideology, and employers' actions in one New Jersey city, Newark. The final section draws out the implications of the statistical and case study.

### The Knights of Labor in Comparative Perspective

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of working class mobilization throughout the industrial West. France, England and the United States, all experienced an upsurge in union membership and an expansion of its organizational reach beyond its more (in the case of England) or less (in the case of France) craft origins to include the industrial proletariat which had hitherto been largely untouched by unionization. In England, the upsurge came in 1889 with the founding of general unions, open to previously unorganized or unorganizable workers, which swelled the membership of the Trades Union Congress by 80 per cent in a mere two years.<sup>6</sup> In France, the expansion was less explosive, although more inclusive. It came after the legalization of trade unions in 1884, when various societies of occupational defense and resistance were allowed to operate openly to bring the growing number of semi-skilled industrial workers into the new syndicalist-led unions. In the United States, the explosion came in the early 1880's after the Knights of Labor was slowly transformed from its craft origins into what Frederick Engels enthusiastically called "the first national organization created by the American working class as a whole." In each country, this unparalleled expansion in the organizational strength of workers went hand in hand with dramatic increases in the number of strikes. In England, eleven million man-days were lost in work stoppages during the upheaval of 1889-90; in France, a series of strike waves took place, first in 1883, and again in 1893, 1899 and 1906, each involving numbers that broke all the records for previously recorded disputes, and in the United States, the number of strikers in 1886 tripled compared with the average for the previous five years (the only years for which we have records) and the number of establishments affected quadrupled as strikes spread to every trade and area.<sup>7</sup>

Beneath this commonality, of course, lay some significant differences. In England, the new unionism grew under and around old

craft unions, while the French labor movement built on local solidarities. Moreover the type of political involvement varied in each case. In France, unionism developed simultaneously with the mass socialist parties, while in England, the Labor Party was a creation of the unions. In the United States, the growth of the Knights spilled over into the political realm as hundreds of local unions participated in local political campaigns between 1885 and 1888, but no national third-party was instituted as a result of the agitation. The important point for this discussion, however, is that in all three countries, this was the period in which workers attempted to build new working class institutions that included the new semi-skilled industrial workers who would soon become the majority of the industrial labor force. It is against this background that one should view the Knights of Labor.

As already noted, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor began as a craft union, but from the start it sought to promote a unionism that would embrace all workers. Its founder, the garment-cutter Uriah S. Stephens, argued that broad-based unionization was the only way workers could resist combined capital; traditional trade unions, he contended, were weak and powerless, "like a bundle of sticks when unbound."<sup>8</sup> But even more than overcoming the weakness of isolated craft locals, Stephens and other leaders of the Knights saw such broad-based organization as the only way to preserve American democracy. By organizing all "producers," they hoped to counter (as they proclaimed in the preamble to their constitution) the "inevitable and irresistible conflict between the wage system and [the] republican system of government." Concentrated capital, in their view, threatened to lead not only "to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses," it also threatened democracy itself. "Lincoln said labor should be above capital, and that capital could not have existed without labor," declared one New Jersey activist in 1886, but now "[t]he aristocracy of America backed up by the aristocracy of the old world is putting capital above labor in the structure of the American Republic."<sup>9</sup> Labor, the creator of all wealth, must unite to defend American liberty by restoring labor and capital to their proper places.

The Knights' prescription for overcoming the "alarming ... aggressiveness of great capitalists and corporations" was self-organization, education, and self-help. "[W]e have formed the Order of the Knights of Labor," went the preamble, "with a view of securing the organization and direction, by cooperative effort of the power of the industrial classes." This prescription, like much in the Knights' program, was open to several interpretations. For some, it meant escape from the wage system through producers' and consumers' cooperatives. For others, it meant a kind of economic democracy where workers, by thoroughly organizing, would impose their own rules upon work, and force employers to submit by the discipline of the boycott and the mechanism of arbitration. For still others, it meant political support for such simple and comprehensive correctives to the operation of the free market as Henry George's single tax program. For a minority, it meant state ownership of the means of production.



No single theory of social relations or overarching program predominated. What united the members of the Order was the belief that both workers and the American republic itself were threatened by the growing concentration of wealth and power, and that this inequality was an inevitable result of the unnatural dependencies of the "wages system." Above all, it is in this belief that labor historians recognize class consciousness. Clearly, and this they are quick to note, it was not a sharply defined proletarianism. Indeed, as is evident in such favored terms as "producers", the Knights had a rather elastic notion of class boundaries. Their animus was reserved primarily for the idle, the corrupt, the non-producer. Even their invective against "capital" contained a telling ambiguity: it was used more often to refer to the monopolist than to an owner of the means of production. Similarly, while they were opposed to the prevailing economic system, they did not believe that labor's emancipation necessarily implied the overthrow of capitalism. Instead, there was a profound ambivalence toward capitalism; they were sure only that they had to redefine the social balance of power with their employers and allies.

In its emphasis on producers, and its opposition to concentrated capital, the American labor movement in this period shared something with both the British and the French labor movements. French workers used a similar republican language, and they too were attracted to producers' cooperation as a method for eliminating competition and the capitalist.<sup>10</sup> British workers also expressed a fervent dislike of unproductive and parasitic middleman, although by the late nineteenth century, such language had an anachronistic feel.<sup>11</sup> But there were important differences in tone and outlook as well. Certainly in Britain, and probably in France, workers had a sharper sense of class boundaries; and in neither of these European countries was there the same certainty that workers were the guardians of the nation's soul. Moreover, a larger minority of workers held socialist ideas in both England and France. But in all three countries it was a period of experimentation, even ideological vagueness as workers and sympathetic intellectuals struggled to find a common language and workable program which would be capable of rallying diverse groups of workers against the onslaught of industrial capitalism.

Indeed, a certain vagueness, or an ability to create common bonds that ignore real differences and social antagonisms, is probably the coin of every social movement. In the US of the 1870s and 1880s, there was much diversity to be overcome, for the working class was fragmented by work experience, skill, background, attitudes, ambition, and religion. Yet there were also common realities: increasing dependence and financial insecurity, long hours and high accident rates, the frustration of a relationship in which the product of their skills and efforts went to someone else. The Knights provided a rhetoric and, as we shall see, an organizational flexibility that, by emphasizing commonality and solidarity (its slogan was "an injury to one is the concern of all"), was able for a short while to supersede diversity.

The Order was founded on Thanksgiving Day, 1869 as a secret

organization by seven Philadelphia garment workers. The original local did not at first initiate workers in other trades as full members; instead it admitted "sojourners" --non-voting members of other crafts who, it was hoped would learn the Knights principles and rituals and then create a local in their own trade. This custom eventually evolved into the practice of allowing workers to create locals which were open to all members of industry or locality (Ware, 1929: 25). Growth was slow in these early years, due partly to its policy of secrecy and partly to the Long Depression that began in 1873. Throughout the 1870's the Order remained primarily an amalgamation of craft locals, although in the late 1870's growth was rapid in eastern coal mining communities. By 1879, about thirteen hundred locals had been founded.<sup>12</sup>

These locals were the cornerstone of the organization. Known as local assemblies, they were organized along occupational, industrial, or territorial lines, depending on the needs and identities of the group of workers involved. Some locals (termed "mixed") were open to all comers (with the famous exceptions of lawyers, bankers, professional gamblers, stock brokers and liquor dealers), while the majority (termed "trade") were organized on the basis of occupation or industry, with the workers defining the scope of the industry or occupation. Local assemblies had the responsibility for carrying out strikes and boycotts, for creating reading room and social clubs, and for establishing cooperative stores and factories. Coordination was provided by "district assemblies, which also sent representatives to the national convention. Constitutionally, this national body (known as the General Assembly) was the supreme authority and it elected the top executives of the Knights, the General Executive Board.

At the end of the depression, the Knights shed their policy of secrecy, thus setting the stage for a period of explosive growth in the 1880's. At first, this growth was largely a reactivation of craft locals that had collapsed in the depression, but soon increasing numbers of less-skilled workers began to join the Order. Although the top leadership opposed strikes, the membership found the Knights a convenient vehicle for such activity, and it was the Order's participation in a series of dramatic strikes that touched off a quickening spiral of organization and unrest. Beginning in 1883 and escalating in 1884 and 1885, highly publicized strikes by Knights of Labor telegraphers and railroad shopmen culminated in a victory over the hated Jay Gould, a national symbol of corporate power. Thousands of previously unorganized workers initiated local assemblies, and the agitation touched off by these organizational gains carried over to the 1886 eight-hour campaign, reaching a feverish pitch as the Knights membership climbed to over three-quarters of a million workers.

While the publicity generated by this unrest spread the Knights solidaristic message, the underlying pattern of mobilization was one which built upon both craft loyalties and community ties between skilled and less-skilled workers. It was not a pattern of national organization covering entire industries (industrial unionism) nor one that built initially on workplace ties between skilled and less-skilled. Instead, it

was a pattern that, like the French labor movement, built upon local community networks.<sup>13</sup>

In 1886, known as the year of American labor's "great upheaval," the Knights reached the height of their influence. During the massive eight-hour campaigns of that year, a bomb exploded during a labor rally called in Haymarket Square, Chicago, to support a demand for the eight-hour day. Over seventy policemen were injured, one fatally, and the police opened fire and killed or injured an indeterminate number of demonstrators. The anarchists who addressed the meeting were immediately blamed for the bombing and, despite absence of proof, intense anti-labor sentiment swept the nation. On the night of the bombing the general executive board of the Knights, meeting in St. Louis, called off their strike against Gould without achieving a single demand. Combined with the general failure of the eight-hour agitation, these developments brought the Knights' explosive growth to a sudden halt.

Membership began to drop off rapidly in the aftermath of these defeats, and the Knights became embroiled in both an internal factional battle, as well as a bitter conflict with a growing number of unaffiliated trade unions. They remained a powerful force in many areas through the 1890's, but never again attained anywhere near the membership or influence they had had in the mid-1880's. By 1890, membership had plummeted to 100,000 members and by 1893, when the national organization served briefly as a vehicle for an agrarian-socialist alliance, it was well under 50,000.<sup>14</sup>

#### Why Did the Knights Collapse? Old Views and New Agendas

The Order's dramatic history has long fascinated scholars, and several have offered explanations for its failure. The standard historical account treats the Knights as a single, unified national entity, and analyzes it in relation to the organization that would eventually supplant it, the American Federation of Labor. The most influential account in this genre is one offered just after World War I by Selig Perlman, a student of John R. Commons.<sup>15</sup> In his view, skilled workers in the United States were unwilling to jeopardize their stronger bargaining position in order to improve the situation for less-skilled workers; thus, when less-skilled workers flooded into the Knights, skilled workers fled the Order and joined the trade unions of the American Federation of Labor. Perlman assumes an inherent opposition between craft and class interests (and hence, between craft and craftless workers), but subsequent work by Ulman strengthens the plausibility of Perlman's account by providing a reason why American workers might have been particularly craft conscious.<sup>16</sup> He points out that economic development involves twin problems for any labor movement: it simultaneously deskills workers while extending labor and product markets. By stressing the first of these problems at the expense of the second, Ulman argues, the Knights essentially gambled that the leveling influence of technological change would be great enough to make

allegiance to the Order a matter of self-interest for skilled workers. But, in Ulman's view, the impact of the market turned out to be greater than the impact of technological change in the United States, thus dooming the Knights.

Like Perlman and Ulman, Philip Foner also interprets the Knights as a single, national organization, but he rejects the argument that the Order failed because its structure could not be adapted to the needs of skilled workers. He points out that the Order was actually highly flexible in meeting the organizational needs of its varied membership, adding that the Knights were destroyed by the national leaders and the ease with which non-working-class members could obtain membership. These middle-class members, he argues, betrayed the rank and file.<sup>17</sup>

Recently, labor historians have rejected both these explanations. They argue quite persuasively, that any explanation which treats the Knights as a single, national organization is both misleading and incomplete because it necessarily distorts our interpretation of what was actually a varied, decentralized association. Therefore, they insist, to understand the Knights, one must see it as composed of thousands of local assemblies, each pursuing, with relative autonomy, local goals and strategies. In their effort to rewrite a history of the Order that avoids the pitfalls of the older accounts, they have undertaken detailed studies of the Knights in industrial cities, like Detroit and Cincinnati (where the Order's dramatic growth membership in the mid-1880's laid the groundwork for highly militant and massive May Day strikes in 1886; as well as in communities like Rutland, Vermont, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin (where the Knights' upsurge resulted in important independent labor politics).<sup>18</sup> To one degree or another, each of these studies take the Commons-Perlman view as a point of departure, and together they present much evidence to refute the view that the Knights were unable to serve the needs of skilled workers, or were somehow unfitted to the American environment. And they have added greatly to our understanding of the importance and meaning of the Knights. But they have been less helpful in providing a general explanation of the Knights' collapse. Their very strength makes it difficult to do so, because the richness of the cases tends to generate highly specific interpretations of the Knights' decline.<sup>19</sup> To the extent that a general theme has emerged, it is one of internal dissension, although not along the simple dichotomous lines suggested by Perlman, Ulman, or Foner. Instead of the significant division being between the Knights and the American Federation of Labor, or between skilled and less-skilled workers, they see the roots of factionalism lying in industrial diversity and ethnic difference. The clearest implication of their work is that the interaction between differing industrial circumstances and varying ethnic combinations will lead to distinct factions in different communities. Thus, they leave us with a research agenda rather than an explanation for the Knights' collapse: we need to gradually accrue case studies until we have enough to be able to distinguish the broad recurrent impulses that worked toward the same end in many communities across the country.

However, before scholars proceed to write a new history of the Knights (and by extension, of the American labor movement) by accruing individual case studies, all organized around the theme of internal factionalism, it makes sense to consider whether or not such factionalism is a cause or a symptom of collapse. As social movements fail, they often disintegrate into factionalism but this does not mean that factionalism alone led to the failure. (For example, the civil rights movement was plagued by factionalism in the end. Does this mean that factionalism caused the collapse of the movement?). Thus, we need to know whether ethnic and industrial diversity always lead to factionalism and collapse in the Knights, or whether other factors, especially those suggested by social movements research (such as workers' resources, speed of growth, and oppositional strength), encouraged both the factionalism and the collapse. The best way of finding out, now that we have these case studies to build upon, is to undertake a systematic study of the general conditions that lead to the collapse of Knights' locals.

## II.

### A Quantitative Exploration of the Knights Collapse: Details of the Analysis

In an effort to uncover the general conditions that led to the collapse of Knights' locals, I have undertaken and report here the findings of a systematic empirical study of local variation in the failure rates of Knights local assemblies in New Jersey. This analysis is designed to identify the organizational and community features that contributed to the failure of local assemblies, and hence to see how well the various explanations given for the Knights' demise account for the pattern of local assembly failures in New Jersey. The circumstances that led to the collapse of local assemblies are examined using event history analysis.<sup>20</sup> Since the defection of skilled workers looms so large in the Commons-Perlman-Ulman accounts of the Knights' demise, I begin by reporting on my analysis of the collapse of skilled local assemblies.<sup>21</sup>

Two features of this analysis should be borne in mind. First, it is formal dissolution that is being examined, not incremental membership loss (which is simply unavailable). Some locals lost large numbers of members and fell on hard times; in this analysis such locals are indistinguishable from more successful assemblies.<sup>22</sup> Second, the term "longevity" is used in a relative sense -- while a few locals remained in existence a decade and a half, the majority were in existence only a few years. (The average life of skilled locals was almost four years, while it was three years for less-skilled locals).

New Jersey was selected because it was an important center of manufacturing with a diverse industrial base. Moreover, the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics collected crucial information about the occupational composition of the Knights that is not available for other states. In addition, the Knights were markedly successful in New Jersey (see Table 1 for an overview of the types of workers organized by the New

Jersey Knights). At the Order's height in 1886, the Knights represented between 13 and 15 percent of the total workers engaged in manufacturing. This percentage of the work force would not be unionized again until the massive organizing drives of the CIO in the 1930's.<sup>23</sup>

All results are based on local assemblies that were organized by manufacturing workers in New Jersey towns between 1879 and 1895. Data on these locals come from a variety of sources, including the Knights of Labor Data Bank compiled by Jonathan Garlock, the Tenth Annual Report of the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, and local newspapers. Data on industry characteristics were collected from the manuscript census of manufacturing, information on communities from the New Jersey state censuses, and information on employers associations from Clarence Bonnett's History of Employers' Associations in the United States, as well as from scattered local sources. Election data were gathered from both secondary and primary sources.<sup>24</sup>

Variables were chosen which, given available evidence, would allow an assessment of the arguments given for the Knights collapse, and to parallel earlier analyses of the Knights' emergence. Seven features of the local union movement are included in the models:

KOL Less-skilled in the local industry: A variable coded "one" when a local assembly of less-skilled workers was present in the local industry.<sup>25</sup> If Perlman is correct, skilled locals will be more likely to collapse when less-skilled workers are organized.

KOL Less-skilled in the community: A variable coded "one" when a local assembly of less-skilled workers was present in the community (but outside the local industry). The distinction between community and local industry was made because earlier work on the Knights' emergence indicated that different dynamics operate at the community and industry level. In addition, if Perlman is correct in his assessment that skilled workers left the Knights when less-skilled workers began to organize in large numbers, it would be helpful to know whether the skilled workers reacted on the basis of direct (i.e. local industry) or indirect (community) competition.

Trade-Union Craft in Local Industry: A variable coded "one" when a non-Knights craft local was present in the local industry. The American labor movement is often portrayed as a head-to-head battle between the Knights and the Trade Unions. This variable, along with the following one, are used to measure the extent to which dissatisfied Knights were encouraged to bolt by the presence of an established craft local in their industry and community.

Trade-Union Craft in Community: A variable coded "one" when a non-Knights craft local was present in the community.

KOL Skilled Assembly in Local Industry: A variable coded "one" when a craft-type Knights' local is present in the local industry. This variable measures organizational proliferation which tends to

contribute to movement decline. Since the Knights sometimes organized workers into separate ethnic locals, this variable also provides a very rough measure of ethnic diversity within the skill-grade.

KOL Skilled Assembly in Community: A variable coded "one" when a craft-type Knights' local is present in the community. This variable is included because an assembly of skilled workers elsewhere in the community would likely be a source of support.

Election Loss: A variable coded "one" when labor party candidates lost. As Fink suggests, the politics were often a spillover effect of Knights organization. However, the loss of a third party ticket was likely to rebound against the Knights even when they had not officially endorsed the ticket.

Several measures of strike involvement were also included in the model originally, because of the expectation that strike success would strengthen local assemblies. In addition, the presence of a national craft union in the industry was also analyzed but none of these variables had any impact on longevity, and are not included in Table 2.

Seven features of the community and industrial context are included in the models reported:

Average size of establishment. The average number of workers per establishment in the local industry. On the one hand, larger firms present more problems for workers' organization, because informal organization, which frequently underlies formal unionization, is generally more difficult to maintain in large shops. On the other hand, workers are generally better paid in larger shops, and would thus have more resources for maintaining local assemblies. In addition, it was the "factory artisans" who had observed the most dramatic effects of the reorganization of production, mechanization, and changing market structure, and who therefore were most likely to be truly committed to the Knights' rhetoric and organizing strategy.<sup>26</sup>

Number of Establishments. The number of factories in the local industry. (The logged value of this variable is used in the analysis.) Alternative sources of employment made workers less vulnerable to employers, and this ability of a local assembly to draw on workers in more than one establishment would tend to improve its chances of survival.

The wage differential between skilled and "ordinary" employees. The percent difference between the wages paid to skilled workers and the wages paid to "ordinary laborers" in 1880. As theorists of the labor aristocracy point out, large wage differentials give skilled workers a vested interest in sectional organization. This would tend to make them less committed to an organization that was, like the Knights, dedicated to working class solidarity.

Technological change. The increase in horsepower per worker between 1880 and 1890, a measure intended to reflect the intensity of mechanization. As noted above, Ulman argues that when technological change is rapid, skilled workers would be more likely to remain in the Knights.

Capital to labor ratio in 1880. The number of dollars invested in the local industry divided by the annual wage bill for the local industry. Employers were generally more dependent upon skilled workers in labor intensive industries and usually had fewer economic resources to invest in technological experimentation to replace them. Hence labor intensiveness would be likely to give workers a great stake in organization while leaving employers' fewer resources to fight it. By this line of reasoning, labor intensiveness should be positively correlated with longevity. However, it may also be that employers in labor intensive industries would be inclined to encourage their skilled workers to organize trade union locals rather than Knights locals, figuring that if they were forced to make peace with some unionization, it would be better if it included only the skilled and not both the skilled and the less-skilled.

Percentage of the employees who are female. The percentage of female employment in the local industry. Women workers were employed almost exclusively in less-skilled jobs and their wages were generally lower than those of less-skilled men. Thus, they had fewer resources to invest in organization, and would probably have been less attractive alliance partners for skilled male workers. Hanagan has suggested that large numbers of poorly-paid women may have contributed to the Knights' collapse because it discouraged skilled workers from staying with an organization devoted to broad-based organization.

One-Industry Town. A dichotomous variable (i.e., a "dummy" variable) coded "one" when a single manufacturing industry dominated the locality. Following Shorter and Tilly, a locality was considered a one-industry town if one manufacturing industry employed more than 50 percent of the total work force employed in manufacturing, and if there was no other manufacturing industry with more than 15 percent of the work force. The community was also classified as a one-industry town if a single manufacturing industry had more than 60 percent of the work force, and the next largest industry had less than 20 percent.

According to recent work on the Knights of Labor, industrial diversity tended to encourage factionalism, and thus the decline of local assemblies. Thus it is expected that local assemblies will survive longer in one-industry towns.<sup>27</sup>

Employers' Association: A variable coded one when a manufacturers' association was present in the local industry. This variable



measures the actions of employers; it is expected that when employers mobilize, this makes the survival of workers organizations more tenuous.

Community population. The log of the township population, measured in 1875 and 1885. Gutman argues that small industrial communities were more conducive to worker organization in the United States in the late nineteenth century because community moral pressure tended to favor workers over capitalists; similarly, Shorter and Tilly found that French employers were less likely to replace strikers in small towns than in large cities. Moreover, city size is correlated with industrial diversity, thus, based on recent work on the Knights, we would expect that larger cities would tend to inhibit longevity by encouraging factionalism.

Ethnic Diversity. Ethnic diversity is calculated for each community according to the following formula:

$$H_i = 100(1 - \sum p_i^2),$$

where  $p_i$  is the proportion of the population in that community born in location  $i$ . Gutman (1976) and others have argued that ethnically homogeneous communities, like small towns generally, continued to have a well-developed sense of community morality and solidarity throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, recent work on the Knights has tied factionalism to ethnic diversity. Accordingly, ethnically diverse communities presumably have made it more difficult for workers to sustain organization.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the varying historical context of the Knights rise and demise is measured by two variables:

National KOL Death Rate: The crude death rate for local assemblies in the national Knights of Labor. This variable is included as a control for the possibility that local variation in the failure rate of Knights' assemblies merely reflects the Knights national pattern of collapse.

Prior 1887? A variable coded "one" for years prior to 1887. After the Haymarket bombing and the loss of the third railroad strike against Jay Gould, the Knights had a much more difficult time maintaining membership and sustaining organization.

Rather than presenting the fully specified model, Table 2 includes only the coefficients for the reduced model.<sup>29</sup> These are shown in the first column. Table 2 also presents standard errors (column 2) and the exponentiated coefficients (column 3). Interpreting the coefficients is much like interpreting unstandardized regression coefficients. Positive coefficients indicate that the independent variable increased the probability of union collapse, while negative coefficients indicate that

the variable increased the probability of survival.<sup>30</sup> The most intuitive interpretation is obtained by the exponentiated coefficients, shown in column 4. They correspond approximately to the proportion change in the failure rate induced by a one unit change in the independent variable. When a variable has no effect, this value is unity. A value greater than unity indicates a positive effect on collapse; less than unity indicates a negative effect. For example 1.1 corresponds approximately to a 10 percent increase in the failure rate per unit change in the independent variable, while .9 indicates a 10 percent decrease. For dummy variables (i.e. those coded "one" for the presence of a particular type of labor organization), the exponentiated coefficient indicates the multiplier of the failure rate for the presence of the variable. For instance, the exponentiated coefficient for the variable indicating the presence of an employers' association is 2.47. This signifies that the failure rate is almost two and one-half times higher (247%) in local industries where the employers are organized (again, controlling for other variables).

#### The Collapse of Skilled Locals

Overall, the results suggest little support for the standard explanations of the Knights' collapse. This can be seen most readily by looking at the first column of Table 2. None of the organizational factors had a significant effect on assembly failures: neither the presence of less-skilled Knights' assemblies nor the presence of trade union locals had any impact on the failure of skilled locals. Thus these results provide no support for the Commons-Perlman view that skilled workers left the Knights to join the trade unions after less-skilled workers joined in large numbers. Some support is found for Ulman's reasoning that the Knights' appealed to skilled workers undergoing technological change, but additional analysis of industry differences shows no support for the other half of his argument: to the extent that one can measure variations in product and labor markets by industry, there is no evidence that the skilled left the Knights in response to the development of the market.

In a very indirect sense, the significance of the national failure rate measure provides some support for Foner's argument that national level leadership policies and problems undercut the Knights. Local assemblies in New Jersey tended to fail when the national failure rate was high. However, this variable does not overshadow the effects of the other variables in Table 5, which indicates that national level events occurred within the context of, and interacted with, local conditions. Foner's other argument, that the Knights were betrayed by increasing numbers of middle-class members, fares less well when confronted with available evidence. The New Jersey Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics provides a list of all the occupations represented in New Jersey's local assemblies in 1887. Out of a total of 40,000 workers, only 113 have middle class occupations, which hardly seems large enough to have betrayed the Knights.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, Table 2 suggests that ethnic diversity (at least at

the community level) had no effect on the survival of Knights' locals. Similarly, electoral failure does not seem to have contributed in any direct sense to the collapse of the Knights.

Instead, these results indicate that the failure of the Knights among skilled workers had more to do with employers strategies and the industrial situation than it did with trade union policy or the Knights appeal to less-skilled workers. Skilled locals lived longest when they were organized in labor intensive settings and when technological change was rapid. In such situations, the Knights republican rhetoric would have had obvious relevance. Locals organized in one-industry towns, in contrast, tended to be short-lived, just as they did when employers' initiated employers' associations. The negative effect of one-industry towns calls into question recent arguments about the fragmenting effects of industrial diversity, as does the fact that population had no effect on longevity. Indeed, skilled locals were over four times more likely to fail when they were organized in one-industry towns. Employers associations also had a devastating effect on skilled locals -- they collapsed two and one-half times faster when the employers organized.

#### The Decline of Less-Skilled Locals

It is clear from Table 2 that, at least in New Jersey, skilled locals did not collapse because less-skilled workers joined the Knights. But what was the relationship between skilled and less-skilled locals in the Knights? Was it characterized by competition or cooperation? And did the two types of locals draw on similar or different sources of support?

Table 3 provides some preliminary answers to these questions. It investigates the relationship between the collapse of less-skilled locals and the organizational and contextual variables described above. The model presented in Table 3 parallels that shown in Table 2, except that it includes time periods. Thus the model in Table 3 measures the extent to which the effects of the independent variables differ in their relationship to longevity before and after 1886.<sup>32</sup>

Because there are time period effects, the story told in Table 3 is more complicated than that told in Table 2. Factors like wage differentials and number of establishments had a significant and identical effect on the longevity of less-skilled locals in both time periods. The former tended to decrease the viability of less-skilled locals, (a finding which reinforces labor aristocracy arguments) while the latter tended to increase longevity throughout the study period. In contrast, other factors had different effects before and after 1886. In the years before 1887, average factory size was positively correlated with longevity, but in later years, it had the opposite effect. Similarly, employers' associations had a positive effect in the first period, and a negative one in the second. Finally, several factors had a significant impact in only one time period. The proliferation of less-skilled locals, for example, tended to overburden resources in the first period, thereby decreasing the probability of survival of all less-skilled assemblies in a local industry. The remaining statistically

significant variables, including the presence of a skilled assembly in the local industry, the percentage of female employees, one-industry towns, and the National failure rate had no significant impact on the longevity of less-skilled assemblies in the early period but did so in the later time-period (a period when, it is important to note, the majority of less-skilled locals failed).<sup>33</sup>

Overall, these findings do not support arguments about hostility or competition between skilled and less-skilled workers, either within the Knights, or between the Knights and the trade unions. The presence of a skilled craft local, whether affiliated with the Knights or the trade unions, did not contribute to the collapse of less-skilled workers. The presence of trade union locals had no effect at all, and the presence of a Knight's skilled assembly in the local industry had a positive effect on the longevity of less-skilled assemblies. Indeed, the biggest problem in terms of competition seems to have been between less-skilled workers themselves.

Instead, these findings provide a picture of locals doing relatively well in a variety of situations before 1887, so long as wage differentials were not too high and resources were not spread too thin by organizational proliferation of less skilled locals in a single industry. After 1886, workers found themselves in more hostile circumstances, and a narrowing of their social base of support seems to have occurred. Small shops, one-industry towns, and high percentages of female employment (these last two tended to go together) provided the best chance of survival for less-skilled locals in the later period.

The varying effect of employers' associations before and after 1886 is worthy of note. One interpretation would be that the presence of an employers association encouraged the survival of less-skilled locals through 1886, but discouraged it thereafter. However, it would be equally consistent with the finding to argue that the direction of the relationship actually goes in the opposite direction, to wit, that this coefficient reflects a tendency for the organization of less-skilled workers to spur employer organization. This latter interpretation fits best with the few available accounts of employers' associations, and it is the one adopted here.<sup>34</sup>

Two comparisons will help to uncover some of the larger significance of these findings. The first illustrates the difference between the conditions that encouraged less-skilled workers to organize in the Knights of Labor and those that sustained such organizations once they had been initiated, while the second demonstrates the different sources of support for skilled and less-skilled locals.

First, consider the differences between the set of conditions that encouraged less-skilled organization and those that sustained it. Earlier work on the formation of less-skilled locals suggested that the Knights used community ties to mobilize less-skilled workers. Skilled workers were more likely to aid the organization efforts of their less-skilled colleagues outside of their industry than inside of it. This

stands in sharp contrast to the findings presented in Table 3, where community ties between workers do not seem to have played a large role in sustaining organization. It is only in one-industry towns, where community and shop floor ties overlap, that we see any evidence of community ties undergirding union survival.

Moreover, as can readily be seen in Table 4, which summarizes the findings of that earlier study, many of the other conditions that encouraged less-skilled organization had only a marginal effect on longevity. This is true of technological change and town-size, both of which were correlated with formation but not survival. Taken together with the negligible impact of worker support at the community level, this comparison indicates that the factors which encourage workers to see the world in class terms (and hence create a Knights' local) differ from those that sustain such organization.

Next, compare Table 3 with Table 2. Only two factors, the presence of an employers' association and the national failure rate, affected the survival of skilled and less-skilled in a similar manner. When employers organized, both skilled and less-skilled locals tended to collapse, at least after 1887. Additionally, both types of locals were adversely affected by the national demise of the Knights. But beyond these two factors, skilled and less-skilled locals seem to have been susceptible to different pressures and to have drawn upon different basis of support. Thus, although the decline of the Knights does not appear to have grown out of a general failure of solidarity, there do appear to have been, with the two exceptions noted above, different underlying dynamics of the failure of the two types of locals. For example, it seems that the effect of industrial diversity, which has played a prominent role in recent discussions of the Knights collapse, tended to undermine only less-skilled locals.

Two overall conclusions about the failure of the Knights' local assemblies follow from this statistical analysis. First, few of the explanations currently given for the failure of the Knights' received much support. The Knights decline, at least as measured by the failure of the New Jersey locals, was not due to a failure of solidarity between skilled and less-skilled workers, nor to competition between the Knights and the trade unions. Indeed, the type of solidarity most difficult to sustain, that between skilled and less-skilled workers in the same industry, did not fail at all. Instead it played an important role in sustaining less-skilled locals in the difficult years after 1886. Similarly, ethnic diversity, at least when measured at the community level, does not appear to have undermined Knights locals. Industrial diversity, on the other hand, did tend to negatively affect the viability of less-skilled (but not skilled) Knights locals. Second, skilled and less-skilled locals tended to be affected differently by most industrial and organizational settings. Only two factors, the national failure rate and the presence of an employers' association, had similar effects on both skilled and less-skilled locals. While it is no surprise that the national decline of the Knights tended to rebound on the New Jersey locals, the negative impact of the employers' association on both the

skilled and less-skilled locals (at least after 1887) should be emphasized and analyzed further. It suggests that those of us who seek to understand the American labor movement too often focus on its internal dynamics. We need to look more carefully at the activities of the employers.

### The Knights, Employers Associations, and the State

As we have seen, employers associations played a key role in the collapse of the Knights in New Jersey. Now, New Jersey is certainly not the nation, and we would want to know a great deal more about the importance of employers associations elsewhere in the United States before placing undue emphasis on their role, but if we assume for the moment that this New Jersey finding can be generalized, it raises an intriguing possibility: Perhaps the reason why the Knights collapsed completely, while the new unionism in Britain and the CGT in France survived, has more to do with the consciousness and actions of employers than with the consciousness and actions of workers. Perhaps employers in the United States organized more rapidly, brought more resources to the battle, and fought more bitterly than their European counterparts. Perhaps, in other words, it is time to turn the old arguments about American exceptionalism on their head.

This is the conclusion of a small but growing body of literature. For example, Holt, in a comparison of iron and steel workers in the United States and Britain, concludes that American employers simply had greater financial resources and political power with which to fight unionism, and that this is the primary reason why British steel workers forged a successful union (and one that was eventually open to less-skilled workers) in the late nineteenth century while US workers did not.<sup>35</sup> Sanford Jacoby reaches a similar judgement after reviewing the evidence on management practices in the advanced industrial countries.<sup>36</sup> And indirect evidence for this viewpoint can be gleaned from recent work by Gerald Friedman, who demonstrates the slowness with which French employers organized, and their tendency to initiate weak, low dues associations once they did organize.<sup>37</sup> Although incomplete, available evidence suggests that American employers were able to organize with less difficulty, and that the associations they established tended to require high dues (which would be used both to provide financial aid during periods of labor conflict, and to restrain members from independent action against those in the association -- see below).<sup>38</sup>

One need not try to explain all international differences in the success of labor movements by appealing to variations in employer strength. Indeed, it would be a mistake to open up our discussion of the development of the American labor movement by including employers while forgetting the state. Again Friedman's work is instructive in this regard.<sup>39</sup> While he agrees that employers were better organized in the United States, he points out that French workers owed their success as much to the French state as to employer weakness or labor's strength. In France, the state feared any unrest that might precipitate

yet another constitutional crisis, and thus when strike action involved large numbers of workers, the state tended to intervene. Intervention generally resulted in shorter strikes and at least some employer concessions.<sup>40</sup> In the United States, on the other hand, the federal government rarely intervened, even when strikes were massive. And on the occasions when it did intervene, the state acted, often violently, against the strikers. Thus, in the United States, workers could not count on state action to neutralize intransigent employers. So even if employers associations had been equally strong in France and the United States, their impact on the labor movement would have been greater in the United States.<sup>41</sup>

When we consider the possibility that employers' associations were unusually strong and well organized in the United States together with the existence of a non-interventionist state, I think that we are much closer to understanding the reasons why employers associations had such a devastating effect on the New Jersey Knights. However, I do not believe that these two factors alone can explain all of the impact of employers associations, especially when we are reminded that the Knights did not merely suffer a temporary setback in the late 1880's but were eventually destroyed as an institutional force. In order to account for that, I think we need to look at the strategy and ideology the Knights used to battle the employers when the employers began to organize. Therefore in the remainder of the paper, I present a brief case study which discusses the conflict between one group of Knights' members, the leather workers, and their employers in Newark, New Jersey. I begin by giving some background on Newark's leather industry and labor movement.

### III.

#### The Knights and the Manufacturers: An Exploration of the 1887 Lock-Out of the Newark Leather Makers

##### Leather and Labor in Newark

By the 1880s Newark had long been a major manufacturing center. The largest city in New Jersey, it was untypical of the state's cities in that its primary industries were diverse; no single industry dominated the way that silk did in Paterson or machine construction did in Elizabeth. Instead, the economy was built around the production of leather and leather goods, jewelry, hats, and clothing; with new industries such as chemicals, electrical machinery, and smelting beginning to play an important role. Indeed, as local boosters often pointed out, it was a town known for the varied skills of its labor force. In 1886, for example, the Mayor proudly proclaimed that "the artisans from our manufactories..., by their skill and industry, have made our city what it is, 'the Birmingham of America.'" <sup>42</sup>

Leather manufacturing stood at the center of this diverse industrial economy, both in terms of the numbers employed and, quite literally, in that many other industries depended upon the by-products of leather processing. Trimmings from hides were sold to Newark glue factories; splits found a ready market in the truck factories, shoe manufacturers brought trimmings and roundings for in-sole stock, and hide shavings, which were an essential ingredient for making prussite of potash for Prussian blue, were sold to the various chemical factories in Newark. Profits derived from sales of waste materials greatly reduced the costs of leather production, thus giving Newark's leather industry an enormous capital advantage.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, leather was adaptable to many uses, and it retained its preeminent place in the City's economy into the twentieth century.

In the 1880s leather, like many other Newark industries was undergoing the final transition from workshop to factory. As Susan Hirsch has shown, Newark's leather trade had begun the process of industrialization quite early; by 1860 almost three-quarters of all leather makers worked in factories that had some steam-powered machinery.<sup>44</sup> After the Civil War output expanded rapidly while at the same time, the number of establishments shrunk. Average shop size increased steadily (in 1890, average shop size was 66.8) as growing numbers of workers were employed by a shrinking group of employers. This was a nationwide development: by 1890 fewer than a quarter of the number of leather establishments were in operation as had been 20 years earlier.<sup>45</sup> Task differentiation and new production processes accompanied the industry's consolidation, so that by the 1880's, the working of hides into leather was done by growing numbers of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Only in later operations such as the splitting of hides and japanning (or finishing, as in the hard gloss given to patent leather, over which Newark manufacturers had a near monopoly) were large numbers of skilled workers required.<sup>46</sup> But improved production techniques did not moderate the unpleasantness of the labor. Leather making had always been odious, dirty work, even when the majority of the employees had been skilled. Industrialization only compounded the situation. Workers were forced to work in foul-smelling, closed (to prevent the leather varnish from setting), and chemically dangerous rooms (full of vaporous turpentine and benzine) where the temperature routinely reached temperatures of 90 to 105 degrees in the winter and 105 to 120 degrees in the summer.<sup>47</sup>

The unpleasantness of the work explains, at least partially, the large numbers of German-born workers among the skilled occupations in the industry. In ethnic and occupational structure, Newark was a fairly typical medium-large city in the America of the late nineteenth century. Immigrants themselves were never a majority in the city (they composed approximately one-third of the population throughout the period), but the foreign-born plus their children composed almost half of the city's total population, and by 1890, they made up nearly three-quarters of those gainfully-employed.<sup>48</sup> Germans were the largest single immigrant group in the period between the Civil War and the turn of the century, followed by



the Irish. As in other American cities, native-born whites occupied the apex of the occupational structure, filling the highest-paid and most skilled jobs, while immigrants predominated as laborers and semi-skilled workers. Leather making, however, was unrepresentative in this regard. Many Germans came to Newark as skilled carriers, thus German workers were found among the ranks of both skilled and less-skilled employees (by 1890, they workers for 27.6 per cent of those employed in the industry). The Irish, who made up 19.6 percent of the work force, on the other hand, were commonly employed as unskilled laborers in both leather and other industries.<sup>47</sup>

Diverse ethnic origins had long characterized Newark's leather work force but neither it nor the industry's early industrialization prevented the development of craft unions. As in Newark's other artisan-based industries (hat making, blacksmithing, trunkmaking, jewelry, etc), leather journeymen successfully organized a craft union in the 1830's. Such unions were not notably successful in sustaining unity or organization, but they were nonetheless remarkably accomplished in keeping journeymen's wage rates high enough to support families, in minimizing female and child labor, and in limiting the work week to sixty hours.<sup>48</sup> These gains, however, were wiped out in the depression of the 1870's, along with the craft unions.

With the end of the depression, craft workers again began to organize, although this time many sought to extend organization beyond the skilled trades to the rapidly growing ranks of the less-skilled. This desire grew, at least in part, out of a recognition of the changed industrial reality. It may have also reflected the activism of the small group of Newark residents who formed the Socialist Labor Party in 1877, although too little evidence exists to assert this with certainty.<sup>49</sup> In any event, it found organizational expression in the founding of LA 1364, a "mixed" Knights of Labor assembly, in 1879.

Despite the predominance of the leather trade in Newark, none of LA 1364's early activists, so far as we know, were leather workers. But like leather workers, the early leaders were drawn from trades (shoemaking, cigarmaking, printing, and sawmaking) that had strong craft traditions.<sup>50</sup> When craft unions themselves began to reorganize (notably, in trades such as cigarmaking and printing), LA 1364's leaders became energetically involved in these revitalized craft locals while retaining their allegiance to the Knights. LA 1364's members were also active in the creation of the Trades Assembly, an organization initiated in 1879 to encourage the federation of all Newark locals. At least half of the delegates to the Trades Assembly in its early years were members of LA 1364. (They were drawn primarily from three trades: printing, cigarmaking, and hatmaking). The close relationship between the Knights and the Trades Assembly would later lead the Trades Assembly to adopt a constitution which incorporated the Order's motto as well as other of its rhetoric.<sup>51</sup>

Overall, however, Newark's labor movement remained weak in the years following the depression, and the Knights were unable to extend

local organization beyond the original assembly until 1881, when they successfully established a second local. Eleven new locals were founded in 1882, two of which were open to less-skilled members (a local of hod carriers, and local for the employees of the Domestic Sewing Machine Company). Building on these gains, LA 1364 organized District Assembly 51 in July of 1882, which began to coordinate the activities of the growing number of local assemblies. Eighteen-eighty-three brought new setbacks, however, as six of the eleven locals founded in 1882 collapsed the following year. But 1883 brought some organizational advances as well, including the first leather local, LA 2432, which was organized by a group of skilled morocco dressers.<sup>54</sup>

In April of 1884 the Knights, along with the Trades Assembly and nine craft unions, held a mass meeting to kick off a campaign to "organize the unorganized."<sup>55</sup> After this, growth was rapid. By 1886, the majority of Newark's industrial labor force had joined the Knights of Labor (estimates put the number between 12,000 and 15,000).<sup>56</sup> Sixty-one locals were initiated in 1886 alone, which brought the total of active assemblies to ninety. These locals represented most sectors of Newark's diverse industrial economy, including those which employed large numbers of women and immigrant workers. Five were leather assemblies; aside from LA 2432, these included LA 4922 (Eureka Assembly), which organized diverse occupations in the leather trade; LA 5080, initiated by skilled Morocco Shavers; LA 5694, established by German tanners; and LA 6975, organized by skilled japanners.<sup>57</sup>

These membership gains had an immediate effect on the internal structure of the Trades Assembly. Workers began to look for ways to democratize the organization that both workers and employers saw as the voice of Newark's labor movement. In August 1885, the Assembly's presidential position was abolished "in order to prevent ... the undue prominence of any one individual member of the assembly."<sup>58</sup> At future meetings, a different chairman was to be chosen each evening.

With the upsurge in membership also came a dramatic increase in the level and range of strike activity. In 1886, twice as many strikes took place as had occurred between 1881 and 1885. Indeed, according to the Newark Evening News, the number of strikes in May and June alone almost equalled the total for the preceding five years.<sup>59</sup> As increasing strike activity began to exhaust the managerial capacity of a combined Trades Assembly and DA 51, the group struggled to successfully arbitrate these strikes, as well as to induce workers to pick their battles more judiciously.<sup>60</sup> But it was difficult to dissuade workers, who struck to redress long-felt grievances and then began to shift to new types of strike demands. These new demands ranged from efforts to assert collective control over the employment relation (for equalization of pay, against the use of boycotted material, for reinstating employees, etc.) to sympathy strikes and strikes to prevent employers from backsliding on agreements they had previously made with their employees. Almost half the strikes that took place in 1886 were over such issues. In addition, a growing variety of workers, especially semi- and unskilled workers, took part in strike activity.<sup>61</sup>

Leather workers were one of the groups that raised new demands in 1886. In May of that year the skilled jappanners (numbering three hundred) struck for three demands: the abolishment of the sub-boss system, an end to piecework, and increased wages (the latter two demands, the workers claimed, were the only way to ensure uniform wages throughout the city).<sup>62</sup> To justify their demands, they noted that they were "compelled to work at starvation wages while the sub-bosses grew rich," and added that their low wages did not compensate them for the "laborious and injurious" effort required to make leather.<sup>63</sup> At first, the manufacturers refused to meet any of the demands, instead issuing a resolution, stating that they would "sustain each other in running our factories as heretofore."<sup>64</sup> The employers believed they had the strategic advantage; after all, DA 51 was already attempting to organize community support and financial assistance for strikes by harnessmakers, hatters, bakers, and steelworkers. Moreover, if the strike went on for too long, over one-thousand leather workers would be thrown out of work as inventories of unfinished leather built up during what was, for manufacturers, the slow season. Nonetheless, it was the employers, and in particular three small firms, who broke ranks first. Within a week, these small employers had abolished the sub-boss system and compromised on the wage issue at the rate of \$15 per week (which represented a twenty-five percent advance). The larger firms held out much longer, but they too began to settle on similar terms after the strike had lasted a month. At the end of the fifth week, the workers won the strike in all firms. This was an important victory not only because it gave skilled leather workers considerably more autonomy at their work than they had had before, but also because it involved a strategic and highly visible group of workers. For the Knights, it was one of the most successful strikes of the year.

Although the jappanner strike involved only skilled leather workers, their strike success proved advantageous for the less-skilled workers as well when wages were advanced in a number of shops. In January of 1887, an assembly of less-skilled tanners (LA 5694, a German local) and an industrial assembly of leather workers (LA 4922, an ethnically diverse local) went on strike to extend higher wages uniformly across the industry.<sup>65</sup> The day after the strike began, the jappanners joined the strike, and the following afternoon, the workers were victorious.<sup>66</sup> An agreement was negotiated between the DA 51 and the leather manufacturers which not only established a new wage scale, but also created a system of shop stewards. These shop stewards would look after the interests of leather assemblies on the shop-floor, and would attempt to settle disputes before strikes were undertaken.

These leather strikes are only two instances of a more general pattern. Judging by their actions, between 1879 and the end of 1886, Newark workers asserted a larger, more militant role for the labor movement and learned to support each other across skill and ethnic lines. While important divisions remained (notably, over political strategy), it appears that Newark workers were developing the sense that, as a group, they shared a common fate. In 1884, delegates of the

Trades Assembly, still composed largely of craft locals, had to be reminded that it was absolutely necessary that both skilled and unskilled workers be represented in the Trades Assembly. And again in 1885, when less-skilled button makers undertook a difficult strike, craft workers had to be told that their support was essential for the growth of the labor movement.<sup>67</sup> By 1886, however, Newark's workers supported each other across both skill and ethnic lines in strike after strike.

But if it is possible to trace, through their strike actions, a steadily growing sense of class identity on the part of Newark's workers, it is more difficult to discover who and what Newark's workers believed they were opposing. As noted, the rhetoric of working-class republicanism was ambiguous in this regard, and as Newark workers struggled to make sense of what was happening both industrially and politically in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, their rhetoric and actions reflected this ambiguity. Especially in the early 1880s, many Newark workers were reluctant to differentiate themselves too starkly from their employers. Instead, they argued that the decreasing worth of their labor was due to "parasitical monopolies" and "vast accumulation[s] of capital." Their view was much like that of the stove moulder from Elizabeth who spoke of labor as "oppressed" and then added that the cause of this oppression (which "placed a huge burden on employer and employee") "resulted from various sources," all of "which work only in the interest ... of capital, to increase which labor was robbed, the manufacturer robbed, and monopolies were caused to flourish."<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, the leaders of both DA 51 and the Trades Assembly sometimes went out of their way to emphasize the conservative nature of Newark's labor movement.<sup>69</sup> And they did so out of a genuine conviction that most employers were honest men who shared a similar view of the world. At the same time, it is important to recognize a certain strategic sophistication in their public claims of moderation, for the implicit threat was that if employers refused to support unions like the Knights, they might be forced to deal with more radical groups. (Since the Socialist Labor Party was active in Newark, even if much in the minority, this threat had some credibility.<sup>70</sup>) For instance, in a labor rally called to support female hat trimmers's, Richard Dowdall, the president of the hat finishers and an activist in the Trades Assembly began by arguing that "the interests of the workingman and his employer are identical."<sup>71</sup> The commonality lay in the fact that "the only safeguard for capital and labor is the organized labor of America" How had he reached this conclusion?

Suppose ... that people were unable to offer fair and legitimate opposition to attempts to crush them, would they not in their desperation do what has been done under similar circumstances before? Resort to conspiracies and criminal violence as a means of retaliation against those who were seeking to tyrannize over them?"

Yet even as Dowdall gave this speech, it is clear that some Newark

workers were uncomfortable with the idea that workingmen and employers had identical interests. This is indicated by the Trade Assembly's reaction when one of its delegates told his fellow members that he was fearful that manufacturers perceived the Assembly as anti-employer. To rectify the misperception, he urged the Assembly to pass a series of resolutions that would explain labor's position, thus making it clear that "we are not here to fight the employers." But the Assembly deferred action, and quietly let the matter die.<sup>72</sup> Four months later, when a long-time Knights activist and ex-president of the Trades Assembly gave a short account of the rise and progress of the Assembly, he pointed to the increasing respect the Assembly was receiving in the press and from the public, noting that "this is not because they love us, but because they fear us."<sup>73</sup>

There is evidence that many Newark workers began to separate their interests more clearly from that of their employers between 1885 and 1886. This can be seen in the way they planned and conducted the 1885 and 1886 labor day parades. Labor Day was not yet a legal holiday and labor's decision to hold the celebration on a workday (not a weekend or an evening) indicates a growing sense of power and identity. But despite the symbolic importance of workers declaring and enforcing their own day for honoring labor, the 1885 parade (held on July 27), included a "miscellaneous display of businessmen," who marched at the end of the procession. A year later, no such display was allowed. As workers prepared for the largest celebration of labor ever seen in Newark or the state of New Jersey, they extended an invitation to employers to attend the speeches in the park ("so that they would be able to hear the workingman's side of the question explained") but, significantly, did not invite them to march in the parade.<sup>74</sup>

In December 1886 the Trades Assembly passed a resolution that barred employers from serving as delegates. What was fueling this growing sense that all employers, not just monopolists, were responsible for workers' oppression? First, evidence was mounting that employers had begun to define themselves as a group separate from labor. In both Newark and across the nation in 1886, employers initiated associations whose common object was to "eradicate whatever form of organization existed among the wage-earners."<sup>75</sup> In Newark, harness, clothing, brewing, and hat manufacturers all organized in 1886.<sup>76</sup> In addition, Newark's Board of Trade (a city-wide organization of Newark's leading manufacturers) petitioned the legislature to reenact the conspiracy laws, which had been repealed in 1883, so that it could prevent workers from using boycotts.<sup>77</sup> As employers began to differentiate themselves more forcefully from labor, it became more difficult for workers to sustain a vision of labor and capital as sharing similar interests. Second, Newark workers lost a devastating 86% of all of their strikes in the last six months of 1886 (compare this with a success rate of almost 50% in the first six months of the year). Surely, employer antagonism had rarely been so obvious to so many Newark workers.

It is impossible to know how widespread this anti-employer view had become by the end of 1886. Certainly, there were those who continued to

believe that capital concentration was the true source of increasing inequality. Such workers found it difficult to see how small employers, particularly those who had come up from the bench, could be in the same category as monopolists.<sup>78</sup> Respect lingered for those individuals who had fulfilled the American dream, especially in the minds of skilled workers, because their own radicalization had come in part from the realization that such mobility was no longer possible. Moreover, these workers may have noticed that in several of the strikes won or compromised in 1886 (the May leather worker strike, the April harness strike, the June shoe industry strike), it had been the small employers who settled first. In the case of the leather strike, as already noted, this had been an important reason for workers' eventual victory. Thus, there were strong countervailing influences to the growing anti-employer sentiment. However, given the passage of the resolution barring employers from the Trades Assembly, it seems likely that a majority of the workers represented in that assembly had come to adopt a much firmer definition of workers' opposition by the end of 1886. And it is probable that the majority of Knights and union members in Newark were moving toward a similar view. But clearly, by 1886 the whole issue of who was in the opposition had become much more important, and more politicized, than it had been even a year earlier.

For the first half of 1887, however, the potential for internal dispute over where to draw the line between labor and capital remained latent. But other conflicts did not stay so safely beneath the surface. Disagreements erupted over political action, trade autonomy, and, to a lesser extent, the trial of the Haymarket defendants.<sup>79</sup> Each of these disagreements undermined workers' sense of common identity as well as their willingness to risk activism in the face of a growing employers' initiative against the labor movement. Membership fell, certainly in the Knights, and probably in the craft unions that had begun to affiliate with the newly formed American Federation of Labor as well.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the disagreements undoubtedly exacerbated ethnic and political tensions in the labor movement. German workers, for example, could be found in all camps, but they tended to be concentrated in two of them, one composed of staunch craft conservatives and the other of socialists.<sup>81</sup>

By the summer of 1887, an uneasy peace had been negotiated. The open squabbles over political action, which had erupted in the Trades Assembly in late 1886 and early 1887, had quieted with the creation of the Central Labor Club, a organization dedicated to supporting labor candidates. And the spill-over of the national conflict between the Knights and the International Cigarmakers Union had ended in Newark with the Knights' losing most of their cigarmaking members, but also with a face-saving compromise for DA 51.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, the Knights and their local assemblies had been weakened by the events of the past several months, but at the same time, the Order was much stronger than it had been a short two years before. It undoubtedly had the potential to rebound.

## The Lock-Out of 1887

At the same time, there can be little doubt that it was a propitious moment to launch a counter-attack against the Knights, and this the leather manufacturers did in June. Their immediate concern was a provision in their January agreement with the Knights that set a limit on the number of hides (forty) a worker had to tan in a day. More generally, however, (and as they would later explicitly state), they were unhappy about the extent to which the leather workers, through contracts negotiated by the Knights, had control over the day-to-day running of their firms. Although the manufacturers coordinated their actions in both the 1886 and 1887 strike, no lasting formal association of employers was created until the manufacturers' defeat in 1887.<sup>83</sup> Some of the larger firms had lost a great deal of money in the 1887 dispute, and afterwards they decided to push for a more aggressive organization of the employers.<sup>84</sup> In the spring of 1887, they initiated the Leather Manufacturers Association of New Jersey (MANU). A few months later, the association selected one of its members, R. G. Salomon, to violate the 1887 agreement (by ordering his men to complete forty-three hides a day), assisted him in hiring strikebreakers (when, as expected, all 125 employees struck over the demand), and turned over to him a large portion of the work of other members to ensure his continued business during the conflict.<sup>85</sup> The Knights were able to induce some of the strikebreakers, recruited from Salem, Massachusetts, to leave, but Solomon successfully obtained others, and the strike was eventually lost. None of the strikers were rehired.<sup>86</sup>

This was the first important strike the employers had won since their defeat by the japanners in May 1886, and it signalled the strength and resolve of the LMANJ not only to the Knights, but perhaps more importantly, to the manufacturers who did not yet fully support the association. By putting aside their individual short-term interest in gaining a competitive advantage over Solomon to win the strike, the members of the LMANJ demonstrated that they had both the solidarity and the financial resources to potentially drive the Knights out of the leather industry. This undoubtedly led employers outside of the LMANJ to reconsider any conclusions they had drawn about the Knights being a permanent force in Newark's leather industry. Moreover, Solomon's victory demonstrated that the price of breaking ranks could be high. If the members of the LMANJ were willing to forego short-term advantages to defeat their employees, they might also be willing to set them aside to defeat manufacturers who did not join or who defected from the employers association.<sup>87</sup> Thus, with a single victory, the LMANJ successfully made both the risks of non-membership and the benefits of solidarity much higher. This probably goes along way toward accounting for how the LMANJ was able to convince a group of employers, who had been unwilling to join the association before the Solomon strike, to put up bonds of between 2,000 and 5,000 dollars ensuring their compliance with the association in July.<sup>88</sup>

Buoyed by their victory, the LMANJ announced in mid-July that they

were going "to fight the Knights of Labor for control over the shops." Beginning August 1, manufacturers would no longer allow their men to return to work unless they agreed to quit the Order.<sup>89</sup> Charles Dodd, the master workman (or leader) of DA 51 moved immediately to avert trouble by writing to George A. Halsey, the president of the LMANJ, suggesting a meeting between the two men to settle any difficulties between their respective organizations. When Halsey refused to see him, Dodd sent a letter to every leather manufacturer, requesting either a meeting or notification that the manufacturer did "not intend to set aside or annul" his contract with the Knights.<sup>90</sup> Most manufacturers responded to Dodd's request, the majority saying that they would abide by the decision of the Manufacturers' Association. Many declared, however, that "they had no grievance against the Knights of Labor and that the proposed shutdown ... was solely for the purpose of adjusting trade matters." The Knights seized upon this seeming support, and attempted to reframe the conflict as one which would hurt the small employers as well as the Knights. As one official said,

We have been expecting this thing for months, and we are fully prepared to meet it. Our different [KOL] associations knew that the formation of the Manufacturers' Association meant an effort to crush out unionism for one thing, and also to crowd out of the business a few of the smaller firms, in order to give a monopoly of the leather business to the big firms. [emphasis added]

The LMANJ, however, dismissed the sincerity of any expression of friendliness toward the Knights on the part of their members. As one anonymous spokesman for the association put it, "when we passed the resolution to close our beamhouses on [August 1] there was not an employer present who did not know that it meant an attempt to assert our rights as employers and to conduct business for ourselves." He added, "...I know that the leather manufacturers, if they hold out together, will eventually crush out of existence the Knights of Labor in this city."<sup>91</sup>

Between the manufacturers' announcement of the lock-out in mid-July and August first, when the lock-out was to be enforced, the Knights debated over whether they should strike before they were shut-out. If they struck immediately, some argued, employers would be left with hides mid-way through the tanning process, which would be ruined if the strike was not settled quickly. But Dodd and the other leaders of DA 51 were anxious to avoid any appearance of responsibility for the trouble; if that happened, it would almost certainly turn public sympathy against them (especially since they had contracts with many of the firms), and would have the added disadvantage of further uniting the manufacturers. In addition, the officers of DA 51 were worried about the high cost of supporting the leather men, and wanted to avoid a confrontation for as long as possible. Dodd estimated that to support even a short strike of the 2,000 affected men could cost more than 150,000 dollars.<sup>92</sup> Even with the help of the Knights national leadership (who came to Newark the last week in July), that amount of money would be difficult, if not impossible, to raise.<sup>93</sup>



The actual conflict began more like a poker game than like the pitched battle between capital and labor that the Knights expected. On August 1, the manufacturers took no immediate action, and the leather workers were momentarily jubilant, believing that the inaction signalled internal dissension among the manufacturers. If so, the events of the next few days played into the employers' hands. When it became obvious that the anticipated shut-out was not going to occur, a few leather workers attempted to call the bluff of one employer who had heatedly denounced the Knights just a few days earlier. But the shop was not one of the Knights' strongholds, and the other workers, who might have stuck with the Knights in the event of a lock-out, resented the minority for trying to precipitate a strike. They refused to follow the militants out of the shop.<sup>74</sup> Over the next few days, rumors of dissatisfaction with DA 51 appeared in the newspapers, and manufacturers told reporters that they had canvassed their workers and found that most were "willing to give up the order rather than lose their work."<sup>75</sup> The manufacturers added,

In no shop in this city has a hide been put to soak this week. As soon as we are rid of the stock that is liable to spoil we will be prepared for a strike, call-out or lockout... [W]e can afford to allow our shops to be kept closed for six months, as there will be no goods on our hands to spoil.

Increasingly, it was became clear that the Knights were being maneuvered into a position where inaction appeared to be weakness. Only by calling out the leather workers could they prove what, just a few days earlier, had been a foregone conclusion: that they had the support of their members. Yet in doing so, they would be the first to break the contracts still in effect between the Knights and the employers. On August 6 the District Assembly called out workers in two firms, hoping that a demonstration of their members' loyalty would induce the LMANJ to negotiate. But although most of the workers heeded the strike call, the LMANJ countered two days later by announcing that it had set a new lock-out date.<sup>76</sup> After August 13 all workers who wanted to keep their jobs would have to sign an agreement to quit the Knights and all members of the LMANJ would have to "conduct his business without any agreement with or recognition of the Knights of Labor" upon penalty of forfeiting his bond.<sup>77</sup>

The next several days brought an escalation of rhetoric and action on both sides. Employers whose shops had already been struck began to hire strikebreakers.<sup>78</sup> In one case, policemen were retained to guard the strikebreakers, a move that outraged workers who angrily denounced it as giving a false impression of worker violence. In addition, the LMANJ announced that it had agents in England, France, and Germany, and that they had found skilled leather workers "only too willing to come here for bigger wages than they could ever earn at home."<sup>79</sup> At the same time, the manufacturers worked hard to maintain unity. Members visited the employers who were worried that they might suffer crippling production losses if their skilled leather workers refused to quit the Knights. The LMANJ assured these employers that, even though leather making was a

highly competitive industry, association members would help in every possible way -- even going so far as to promise to rotate among firms the skilled workers who remained on the job.

For its part, the District Assembly struggled to find an effective strategy for dealing with the much greater resources of the LMANJ. Each day brought increases in the number of employees thrown out of work, as manufacturers rushed to meet the August 13 deadline. An effective community-wide boycott was organized to prevent the sale of food and supplies to strikebreakers, forcing at least one employer to set up both a cafeteria and sleeping-quarters inside his factory.<sup>100</sup> Workers were also successful in inducing some strikebreakers to leave--eventually, the Knights would even pay passage to England for four British citizens who came to Newark without knowing that they were being hired to replace strikers.<sup>101</sup> But while such tactics helped to maintain day-to-day solidarity, the Knights knew that they had to find a way to break the employers' resolve. It was becoming painfully obvious that some of the employers were willing to do almost anything to break the Knights; not only were they voluntarily giving up months of profit, they were also spending large sums of money to recruit skilled replacements from as far away as Germany. The Knights talked of a nation-wide boycott of all leather made in Newark but, as one manufacturer soon pointed out, it had little chance of success because the markets for Newark's leather industry were world-wide.<sup>102</sup> Thus the leaders of DA 51 began to believe that their only hope was to undermine employer solidarity.

Both pragmatic and ideological considerations led DA 51 to devote most of their energies to dividing the employers. Pragmatically, they had few choices. Although they assured both the leather workers and the press that they had the financial reserves to maintain the strike, at one point even claiming that they could hold out for three months, Dodd and the other district officers must have known from the day the lock-out was first announced that they actually had very little money in the treasury. The Order's dues were very low (\$3.00 per year) and the district assembly had no strike fund, so the only way to support strikes once the dues revenue was gone was to appeal to the local assemblies and trade unions.<sup>103</sup> As noted, Newark workers had lost the majority of their strikes over the past year, which had exhausted the treasury and had sapped the resources of many of the locals in the district as well. Moreover, summer was the slow season for many of Newark's workers, which meant that DA 51 could count on the working-class community for only limited funds.<sup>104</sup> The Knights' national executive board promised to help, but despite workers' expectations, its reserves had also been depleted in the many conflicts it had been involved in during 1886 and 1887.

However, pragmatic reasoning alone did not dictate the Knights' strategy. As the officers of DA 51 viewed the forces arrayed against them, the clearest cause of their predicament was indeed concentrated capital. This was shown most clearly by the manufacturers who had initiated the LMANJ and who were now directing the lockout: they were the owners of the three largest leather firms in Newark.<sup>105</sup> It also

seemed quite possible that the small employers might yet be persuaded to take a conciliatory stance toward the Knights. Not only, as we have seen, had the smaller manufacturers settled first in the 1886 strike, but it was disproportionately the smaller firms who refused to join the employers association, or if in the association, who delayed posting the lock-out notice.<sup>106</sup> Much of the small employers' reluctance to go along with the LMANJ lay in their greater economic insecurity; because leather manufacturing was a highly competitive industry, they faced bankruptcy when production was disrupted for even a short time. As one smaller employer told a reporter that he "never entertained a thought of fighting the K. of L. when he joined the Manufacturer's Association." But now, given the highly competitive nature of the leather industry, he was trapped. As he complained to a member of the Knights, "[i]f you call out my men I can not go on with my work, and if I hold out against the order of the association, I will be ruined."<sup>107</sup> Thus, the small employers probably were susceptible to the argument that concentrated capital was as much their enemy as the Knights of Labor. On August 12, two or three members of the employers' association (we do not which ones) approached a lawyer to find out whether or not the manufacturers' association could really enforce discipline by keeping their bonds. It was also clear that the LMANJ was itself worried about winning and keeping the smaller firms, as they had demonstrated when they assured the small manufacturers that they would lend them skilled workers. Thus, it was not unreasonable that the Knights believed that if they could successfully frame the conflict as one of labor and enterprise against monopoly, they might be able to break up the LMANJ and avoid losing the conflict.

But framing the conflict in this way had two significant drawbacks for DA 51: it tended to discourage the Knights from exploiting their ability to disrupt production, and it ran the risk of intensifying internal tension within the labor movement. It discouraged the Knights from walking out during critical periods in the leather production cycle because workers hoped that if they avoided hurting employers, employers might be more easily convinced that labor was good, while monopoly was corrupt and unfair. It ran the risk of heightening internal divisions because the Knights' leaders were taking a view of labor's opposition that had by 1887 become the minority position. Indeed, very early in the conflict, it became clear that there were two factions among the leather workers, one, a conservative faction which supported DA 51 for the way it was managing the conflict, and another, a radical faction which was unhappy about DA 51's moderation. Since these two factions also had ethnic overtones (the radical faction tending to have more German adherents, and the conservative faction having more English and Irish adherents), when DA 51 escalated its attempts to rhetorically include the small employers in labor's camp, the result was increased ethnic conflict along with increased division over labor's vision of itself.

Given the Knights' strategy and their financial constraints, they needed to break the manufacturers' unity fairly early if they were to prevail. The longer the lock-out lasted, the more difficult their financial situation would become, and the greater the probability would be of internal division. But this early settlement was not forthcoming.

By the eve of the lock-out, nearly 800 men were already out, and some of them had been without a job for almost a week, which meant that they would soon need financial support.<sup>108</sup> On August 13, the official beginning of the lock-out, an additional 455 men were thrown out, bringing the total number of workers to 1255.<sup>109</sup>

On August 15, DA 51 received more disappointing news: all of the employers who had promised Dodd that they would not participate in the lock-out, did so despite their agreement to the contrary. Nonetheless, the Knights kept up their efforts to win over manufacturer support even in the face of this setback -- sending some employees back temporarily so that they could take care of hides that might be ruined.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, they posted workers at the railroad station in an effort to convince strikebreakers to return home. Eventually, the Knights also sent workers to the immigration headquarters at Castle Rock, New York, where they alerted the Commissioner of Immigration that leather workers might be entering the country illegally as strikebreakers.<sup>111</sup>

By the second week of the lock-out, it was becoming increasingly clear that the Knights' appeals to the small manufacturers was not having the desired effect. While eight of the small manufacturers, who from the beginning had refused to join the employers' association, did not lock out the Knights, the leather workers were unable to convince any of the other thirty-three manufacturers to break with the association. Indeed, on the 19th of August, the LMANJ moved to intensify pressure on the eight hold-outs. It threatened that if the eight did not join in the lock-out, the association would cut off supplies of raw hides, and call in all outstanding notes and claims held by members of the LMANJ against these small firms. Of course, such threats also reminded those who belonged to the LMANJ of the possible consequences of breaking ranks. DA 51, in what was surely an act of desperation responded with a circular addressed to the businessmen of Newark which argued, in part,

Gentlemen: The enforced idleness of 1200 men, citizens of this city who, with those depending upon them for support number 4000 persons, is a matter which directly affects your interests. Opposition by the manufacturers to a perfectly legal organization of labor, is the cause of this unfortunate state of things, hurtful not only to all those immediately concerned, but to the business community at large; for what injures one portion in a degree injures all. [emphasis added]<sup>112</sup>

We can only guess at the workers' reaction to this circular because they refused to discuss internal differences in the press. But it is not difficult to imagine what the effect the underlined passage would have had on those workers who had attended the 1886 labor day parade or those who had voted in 1886 to exclude all employers from the Trades Assembly. Here were the leaders of the leather workers attempting to stretch the Knights' motto, long a clarion call for labor solidarity, into a plea for help from the very men who were daily hiring strikebreakers and waging the strongest assault ever mounted against labor in the city of Newark!

Moreover, we can tie the timing of this circular to increasing tension between German and non-German Knights, although, again, we do not have the type of evidence available that would allow us to make an explicit link between DA 51's mounting effort to win over the small employers and internal dissention within the Knights. Obviously, there were additional reasons why conflict along ethnic lines might have been increased at this time -- the growing sense that the lock-out would be lost combined with the fact that fewer German leather workers were Knights' members would by themselves have enough to aggravate ethnic tensions. But nevertheless, I think that the sentiments expressed in this circular were responsible for some of the divisions among the Knights that the press reported during the third week in August. On August 25, a mixed assembly of German workers (none, so far as we know, were leather workers) disbanded and gave the money left in their treasury (fifteen dollars) to the local assembly of German tanners. One of the reasons given for the disbanding was dissatisfaction over the leadership and management of DA 51. <sup>113</sup>

As the third week of the lock-out began, the leather workers position was growing desperate. Local assemblies and trade unions had raised about a thousand dollars for the leather workers since the beginning of the lock-out, and more than double that amount had come in from other sources, but this did not go far when divided among 1200 workers and their families. Complaints about the lack of aid grew bitter, and Dodd was criticized repeatedly for having made promises of aid that DA 51 was unable to keep. He in turn began to attack the trade unions, accusing them of not helping the leather workers enough, thus precipitating a continuing round of mutual recriminations. The financial difficulties were strained further by the continuing need to deal with strikebreakers, the number of which had reached 650. <sup>114</sup> Paying those who decided to return home was costly, a fact the employers exploited. When leather workers convinced four British japanners brought over as strikebreakers to return home, a spokesman for the LMANJ responded by saying that he would bankrupt DA 51 by "bringing japanners over until the district assembly gets tired of paying." <sup>115</sup>

On August 29, the Knights national office was able to at last to provide some financial aid (the amount was not made public), which temporarily buoyed the spirits of the leather workers. But by this time it had become painfully obvious to the workers that the manufacturers were going to be able to hold out longer than the leather makers. Thanks to the strikebreakers, production in all LMANJ shops was continuing, and on September 2 the LMANJ called off their daily meetings, saying, "[t]he trouble as far as we are concerned is at an end." <sup>116</sup> The leather makers refused to give up the fight, however, and in a last hurrah, their fellow workers placed them at the head of the labor day parade, (held in 1887 on the state's first official labor holiday) and promised them all the proceeds of the celebration. By mid-September, however, it was clear that the leather workers had suffered an absolute defeat. Some reapplied for their old jobs, but at least half were turned away, and all the shop stewards were blacklisted. Other leather makers left Newark to find work elsewhere. About 350 still remained out of work at the beginning of

November.<sup>117</sup>

The defeat of the leather workers in the 1887 lock-out ended union organization in Newark's leather industry and had serious repercussions for the city's labor movement. Organizationally, the loss was devastating. Of the three local assemblies directly involved in the lock-out, two collapsed when the workers went back to work, while the third disbanded after the new year. Other local assemblies experienced similar failure rates. At the beginning of 1887, there were 48 local assemblies of manufacturing workers in Newark, while at the end of 1888, only 12 of these were still active. Moreover, the Knights inability to prevail over the leather manufacturers severely undermined the influence of those local assemblies that survived. This could be seen both in "a tendency on the part of employers generally to treat their employees with less respect and consideration than formerly," and in the disarray that accompanied the Knights' strike efforts in 1888 and in the precipitous decline of the Trades Assembly.<sup>118</sup> A few Knights' locals (notably LA 1362) remained active as late as the mid-1890's but generally, both the Knights of Labor and the Newark labor movement had been dealt a crushing defeat in 1887. When the labor movement rebounded again at the end of the 1890's, it did so by eschewing both the Knights' alternative vision and the inclusion of the less-skilled.

Working-Class Republicanism and Employers' Associations: Some Conclusions from the Newark Case

For goodness sake let up. We have enough to worry and fret over without the constant howl that labor, the producer of all wealth, is robbed. A man who has not discovered this already will never know it. How to catch the robber, stop the robbery, and enjoy the fruits of our own labor is what we want to find out.

New Jersey Unionist, April 14, 1888

The Knights' experience with the LMANJ suggests two reasons why the creation of employers' associations had such a devastating effect on the Order's local assemblies. First is the obvious one: employers had many more resources and hence a great deal more maneuvering room than workers. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the Knights, even if they had chosen another strategy and made no mistakes, could have won against the employers so long as the manufacturers were unified and willing to commit so much of their energy and capital to defeating the Knights. At the same time, it is important not to overestimate the ease with which the employers' organized. They shared many of the same mobilization problems workers faced: they were in a highly competitive environment, were often

suspicious of each others' motives, and were divided internally between large and small employers. (Indeed, the employers had been unable to sustain the informal organization that had developed around the 1886 and 1887 strike once the immediate threat had passed.) Their success depended on overcoming, at least temporarily, their short-term interests in stealing each other's markets and on their ability to maintain solidarity. Certainly, their smaller numbers eased mobilization. But in addition, the very monopolization and concentration that the Knights so abhorred was the source of the capital that financed the lock-out. It allowed the LMANJ to absorb the costs of training less-skilled recruits and to go as far as Europe to obtain skilled strikebreakers. But capital alone was not enough. The large employers had to find a way of encouraging or coercing the small employers of staying with the LMANJ even when it did not seem to be in their interests to do so. Here the bond, a tactical innovation, provided a sufficient deterrent to breaking ranks.

Second, the actions of the LMANJ led to the collapse of Newark's local assemblies because the Knights fought the manufacturers by emphasizing workers' commonality with small employers. This was a strategy that grew naturally out of working-class republicanism, and it was pursued for this reason as well as because Da 51's leaders could think of few alternatives. But the strategy was an unsuccessful one, and in 1887, it was also one that unleashed internal conflict and ultimately discredited the Knights. Thus, the Newark lock-out demonstrates some of the ambiguities inherent in the ideology of working-class republicanism. It could and did serve as a basis for building working-class identity, but when workers were confronted by hostile and unified employers associations, it led workers to analyze their situation in such a way that they were unable to recognize the nature of the opposition that was arrayed against them.

The Newark case suggests then that it was neither employers associations nor working class-republicanism alone that pushed the Knights toward collapse. Instead it was the combination of the two in a period in American history when the republican world view provided a plausible analysis of changing circumstances. In this regard, it is worth returning briefly to the French case, because France is the one other country where radical republican ideas were popular among workers in the period between 1860 and 1890. No where in the French literature do we find the same stretching of republican rhetoric or the same appeals to the small employers. If my earlier analysis about cross-national variations in the strength of employers' associations is correct, then the weakness of French employers associations provides one reason why French workers did not make the same sort of appeals to small employers; since there were few strong employers associations, workers were not led to fight against them with the same fervor they were in the United States. But another reason is suggested by the comparison as well. American industry was growing much more concentrated in this period, while French industry was dominated by small-scale enterprise throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>119</sup> Thus in the French case, there were not the same glaring differences between employers. When French workers were

confronted with employer hostility, it would have made much less sense to continue to define the world in terms of monopolists versus producers. Their experience with French employers over time would have led them to either gradually transform republican ideology into a more generalized critique of capitalism, or to abandon such ideas all together in favor of socialism. In the United States, on the other hand, the rapidity of concentration gave republican ideas a plausibility that eventually led Charles Dodd and other Newark Knights to think that they might be able to enlist the small employers in their battle against monopoly.

### Conclusion

This paper offers the beginnings of a new explanation for the failure of the Knights of Labor, one which builds upon social movements insights and recognizes the distinction between disposition and action. It suggests that the Knights failed because their rapid growth and early successes resulted in the mobilization of powerful employers' associations. These associations had no interventionist state to constrain them, and they had the benefits of growing economic concentration at their disposal. As the Knights attempted to overcome the hostility of these associations, they drew upon the rhetoric of working-class republicanism to fashion an analysis of the nature of the forces arrayed against them. Their analysis led them to attempt an alliance with small employers, a strategy which did not work and which created internal schisms.

This explanation stands in sharp contrast to the standard historical account which attributes the Knights' collapse to a failure of solidarity, particularly to the defection of skilled workers. A statistical analysis of Knights of Labor locals found no support for this scenario. Indeed, it suggested that solidarity between skilled and less-skilled workers played an important role in sustaining less-skilled locals in the difficult years following the Haymarket bombing.

The explanation developed here is also different from that offered by scholars like Philip Foner. Foner argues that the Knights were destroyed by middle class members, who though in the minority, came to dominate the Order and blunt its class appeal. In New Jersey, there is little evidence of numerical domination, at least not in 1887, the one year we have enough data to assess the claim. It is true that the Knights tried to win support from small employers when they were confronted by employers' associations, and it is easy to see how Foner and others might conclude that these appeals were the work of middle-class members. But this study suggests that it was not middle class membership who played the decisive role; rather, it was the combination of an increasingly concentrated economy and employer hostility that led some Knights leaders to stretch working-class republicanism to the point that it lost its class appeal.

The explanation advanced here is more compatible with recent work on the Knights by labor historians like Richard Oestreicher.



Oestreicher argues that the Knights collapsed under the weight of a factionalism that did not correspond in any simple way with the divide between skilled and less-skilled workers or the one between trade unionists and Knights of Labor members. Instead, he traces the divisions to industrial and ethnic diversity. This study has placed less emphasis on the direct effects of ethnic and industrial diversity, although it does provide some support for Oestreicher's conclusions. The statistical analysis of less-skilled assemblies suggested that industrial diversity contributed to their failure. And the Knights' attempts to win over the small employers certainly exacerbated tension along ethnic lines. Where Oestreicher and I differ is in our emphasis and in our view of how these internal differences were pushed the to the critical point.

This analysis, and in particular the case study of Newark, also suggests an important corrective to those who argue that the rhetoric of working class republicanism provided a language of class that was, like socialism, capable of rallying workers against the onslaught of industrial capitalism. In Newark, when workers were confronted with employer hostility, the rhetoric of working-class republicanism did not lead in the direction of expanding class-consciousness.

Finally, this paper has two implications for political sociologists. The first is that we need to take recent labor history into account when we speak of the labor movement. To the extent that our picture of the American labor movement has been influenced by the standard interpretation of the Knights of Labor, we need to amend our assessment in light of recent interpretations. Second, we need to be careful when we compare labor movements that we do not fall into the trap of interpreting them through only one prism -- the prism of class identification. This happens whenever we attempt to read consciousness from action, or to assume that action will develop along with consciousness.

1. Richard Oestreicher, "Urban Working-Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics, 1870-1941," Journal of American History, (1988) 74: 1258; Sean Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790-1929," International Labor and Working Class History, 26 (1984): 18.
2. Briefly, working-class republicanism is an ideology, grounded in American equal rights traditions, that sees a fundamental contradiction between the dependence inherent in the wage system (or capitalist social relations) and the republican system of government. The Knights' appropriation of working-class republicanism is discussed below.
3. Roy Rosenzweig, "Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play: The Struggle over Recreational Space in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1870-1910," Radical History Review, 21 (Fall 1979), 31-46; David Brundage, "The Producing Classes and the Saloon: Denver in the 1880's," Labor History, 26 (Winter 1985). 29-52; Frank Couvares, The remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).
4. Scott McNall, The Road to Rebellion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. chapter 1.
5. E.g., true, the Knights briefly united skilled and less-skilled behind a class banner, but its meteoric rise was followed by an equally dramatic decline, which, according to this line of argument, was the only possibility given the hostility of the American environment and the American worker to class mobilization.
6. Eric Hobsbawm, Workers: Worlds of Labor (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 157.
7. Hobsbawm, 1984: 157; Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, Strikes in France 1830-1968 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 48-50; Jeremy Brecher, "The Knights and Strikes, 1885-6," paper presented at the Knights of Labor Centennial Symposium, May 1979, Chicago, Illinois, 6.
8. Carroll Wright, "An Historical Sketch of the Knights of Labor," The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 1 (January 1887), 141.
9. Elizabeth Daily Journal, 3/16/1886.
10. Ron Aminzade, Class, Politics, and Early Industrial Capitalism: A Study of Mid-Nineteenth-Century Toulouse, France (Albany State University of New York Press, 1981); see also Michelle Perrot, "On the Formation of the French Working Class," in Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, Working Class Formation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
11. Hobsbawm, 1984: 260.

12. Jonathan Garlock, "A Structural Analysis of the Knights of Labor," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1974. Standard histories of the Knights include Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895 (D. Appelton and Co., 1929, reprinted by Peter Smith, 1959), Selig Perlman, "Upheaval and Reorganization," in John R. Commons, et al, History of Labor in the United States (New York, Macmillan, 1918), Vol. 2; Gerald N. Grob, Workers and Utopia (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), and Philip S. Foner, History of the Labor Movement in the United States: From the Founding of the A.F. of L. to the Emergence of American Imperialism, (New York: International Publishers, 1955) Vol. 2.

13. Kim Voss, "Labor Organization and Class Alliance: Industries, Communities, and the Knights of Labor," Theory and Society, Forthcoming.

14. See sources cited in note 10. The account of the General Executive Board's actions following Haymarket comes from Nick Salvatore, Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 68-69; membership figures come from Grob, 1961: 98, 133.

15. Perlman, 1918; and A Theory of the Labor Movement (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

16. Lloyd Ulman, The Rise of the National Trade Union (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 349-77, esp. 374-377.

17. Foner, II:157-160.

18. Leon Fink, Workingmen's Democracy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Richard J. Oestreicher, Solidarity and Fragmentation (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), Steven J. Ross, Workers on the Edge (New York: Columbia University Press).

19. For example, Ross argues that the Knights' ability to forge a strong sense of solidarity resulted from the decision made by Cincinnati's mayor to call out the local militia in the course of the May Day strikes. This act so outraged Cincinnati's workers, who felt that they were law-abiding while those in power were not, that they temporarily transcend their separate and often opposed identities as citizens and workers. However, because this unity was based on actions taken by those outside the working class, it did not hold, and the Knights collapsed amid increasingly bitter battles over ideology and tactics.

Since few mayors reacted to the May Day strikes by calling out the militia, it is difficult, at this juncture, to weave Ross's explanation for the Knights' failure into a more general explanation.

20. Event history analysis provides a way of analyzing a longitudinal record of when events happened to a sample of individuals or collectivities. In this paper, the "event" of interest is the failure of Knights of Labor local.

The instantaneous rate of death is the dependent variable. The

rate is formally defined as

$$r(t) = \lim_{dt \rightarrow 0} \frac{\text{Pr}(\text{death } t, t + dt / \text{alive at } t)}{dt}$$

where  $\text{Pr}(\text{death } t, t + dt / \text{alive at } t)$  is the conditional probability of a death between  $t$  and  $t + dt$  given that the organization is alive at  $t$ . Rate models have the advantage of being flexible in specification and they are relatively insensitive to the censoring problem when properly estimated. On an intuitive level, one can think of them as predicting inversely the longevity of an organization: the higher the rate, the lower the expected lifetime and vice versa.

The above equation expresses the rate of failure as a function of time. But the rate of any event may depend not only on time but also on exogenous variables. Indeed, the main empirical interest in this analysis is not to estimate the rate at which new local assemblies failed but to determine how the rate of failure is affected by such factors as average establishment size and the presence of craft organization. Causal effects are built into the model by expressing the relationship between the failure rate and the exogenous variables as follows:

$$\ln r(t) = a_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + \dots + c_1 Y_1(t) + c_2 Y_2(t) + \dots,$$

where the  $X$ 's are independent variables that, although varying across local industries, do not change over time; the  $Y(t)$ 's are independent variables that do vary over time; and  $a_0$ , the  $b$ 's, and the  $c$ 's are parameters to be estimated, that is the effects of the independent variables on the rate of founding. A log-linear specification was chosen because it ensures that the predicted rate will be positive and because all effects are expressed as proportional to the rate. For those readers unfamiliar with event history methodology, it should be noted that a rate equation in its log-linear specification bears a strong resemblance to the more familiar linear regression equation.

For an introduction to event history analysis, see Glenn R. Carroll, "Dynamic Analysis of Discrete Dependent Variables: A Didactic Essay," Quality and Quantity 19 (1983), 425-460; and Paul D. Allison, "Event History Analysis," Sage University Paper series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984). A more technical exposition can be found in Nancy B. Tuma and Michael T. Hannan, Social Dynamics: Models and Methods (Orlando: Academic Press, Inc, 1984) while a non-technical, more philosophical discussion is presented in Andrew Abbott, "Sequences of Social Events: Concepts and Methods for the Analysis of Order in Social Processes," Historical Methods 16 (1983), 129-147.

21. The Knights of Labor allowed each local assembly to define its own organizational basis, placing neither institutional or ideological constraints on the skill level of its members nor requiring individual locals to organize all occupations or skill levels. When I refer to "skilled locals" or "craft locals" (terms I use interchangeably) I mean those locals that chose to organize only skilled workers. Of the 194 local assemblies that organized manufacturing workers in New Jersey, 45 were skilled locals.

The U.S. Census' Special Report on Employees and Wages (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1903) was the primary source for determining the skill levels of occupations organized in Knights of Labor locals. This publication grew out of a study commissioned by the Census Bureau to investigate manufacturing occupations in 1901. Researchers studied job names in detail by going to factories and examining work processes and payroll lists. Based on the amount of "judgement, ability, experience and supervisory duties required," each job title was assigned a skill grade (first, second, or third). For example, glassblowers and pattern makers are considered first- grade occupations; second grade occupations include bolt makers and machine tenders; and third grade occupations include laborers and bobbin boys.

22. Dissolution dates were coded as follows: For locals that had their charters revoked by the national office, and for those that were formally declared "lapsed" because of failure to pay dues, the date of these events were recorded. For other locals, there is not known date of termination. In these cases, I assigned dissolution dates according to the last reference I found in either national or local sources.

23. Kim Voss, "Working Class Formation and the Knights of Labor, 1875-1895," unpublished PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1986, 65. For a brief history of the Knights in New Jersey, see Leo Troy, Organized Labor in New Jersey (Princeton: D. Van Norstrand Co., 1965, and Voss, 1986, chapter 3.

24. Election information was gathered primarily from Fink, 1983: 28-29; Foner, 1955; and various issues of John Swinton's paper. I am indebted to Leon Fink for providing me with additional information about the dates of elections reported in his book.

25. See Voss, 1986, appendix I for the industry classification used in the analysis. If less-skilled workers are organized in the "local industry," this means that, for example, The term "local industry" is used rather than simply "industry" because I mean to refer only to the workers in a single town. For example, the workers employed in Paterson's silk industry constitute one local industry and the workers employed in Jersey City's silk industry compose another.

26. See Ross, 97-100 for further elaboration of this argument..

27. Other arguments have also been made which would lead one to expect that one-industry towns might encourage longevity. Mary Lynn McDougall, "Consciousness and Community: The Workers of Lyon, 1830-1850," Journal of Social History, 12 (1978), 129-145; Daniel J. Walkowitz, Worker City, Company Town (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Clyde Griffen and Sally Griffen, Natives and Newcomers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 12-13 all suggest that because one-industry towns concentrate large numbers of workers who share similar life changes and grievances, they tend to strengthen solidarity. Others, however, have pointed out that workers are more vulnerable to employer power in one industry towns (see, for example, Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, Amoskeag (New York: Pantheon, 1978). This may be a particular problems for the skilled, who employers would rightly see as the most dangerous members of a labor organization like the Knights, who because they made class-based appeals, would be seen as particularly challenging to employer authority.

28. To fully assess the impact of ethnic diversity on the failure of Knights locals, one would need two other types of information: data on the ethnic composition of the industry and the local assembly. Unfortunately, this information simply does not exist.

29. Normally, failure rate models include an estimate of the rate of declining age dependence over time, and both the model presented in Table 2 and the one presented in Table 3 were originally estimated using a Makeham law specification. However, the data on the local assemblies do not display the usual form of age dependence -- or for that matter any apparent form of monotonic age dependence, and the more sophisticated models did not significantly improve upon the constant rate models used here. When Carroll and Huo estimated failure rate models for all the local assemblies in the United States, they found a similar lack of monotonic age dependence. They went on to estimate models that included time-period effects, but their time-periods were defined on the basis of age, not historical time. When I estimated models for less-skilled assemblies, I included historical time-periods rather than age time-periods because my reading of the Knights' history suggests that this the more important type of time-dependence. In addition, I wanted to have models that were comparable to those I had used in an earlier study of the formation of Knights' local assemblies. See Glenn R. Carroll and Yangchung Paul Huo, "Organizational and Electoral Paradoxes of the Knights of Labor," unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley, 1985).

30. For example, the coefficient for average establishment size is  $-.0022$ . This means that a one employee increase in average establishment size decreases the logged rate at which skilled assemblies collapse by  $.0022$ , controlling for other variables.

31. This figure was obtained by adding up the number of clerks, storekeepers, physicians, and teachers in the mixed assemblies. It is possible that some of the trade assemblies included employers; the New Jersey Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industry, Tenth Annual Report

(Sommerville: Unionist-Gazette Printing House, 1888) [hereafter NJBSLI] does not indicate whether the members of the trades assemblies are employers or employees. Based on my reading of New Jersey newspapers, I think that Foner exaggerates the number and influence of middle class members, at least in the urban areas. Many of the employers that were in the Knights were those like of Newark, who published the New Jersey Unionist. All labor movements generally had activists like him. As will be discussed, I don't think the problem was actual middle-class membership; instead it lay in the Knights strategies for combatting employers' associations.

32. Although the inclusion of time periods adds to the complexity of Table 2, it also improves the model's fit greatly. Period effects were not estimated for the models reported in Table 1 because there were too few cases to support a more complex model.

33. In general, these findings are plausible and can be interpreted in a relatively straightforward manner. However, the coefficient for percent female requires additional comment. The percentage of the labor force in the local industry who are female has a large and positive effect on survival in the post-1886 period. Two very different interpretations of this result are possible. First, it is possible that the membership of local assemblies reflects the composition of the labor force, and thus that this finding indicates the viability of locals with female members in the difficult post-1886 period. This interpretation would support the work of Kessler Harris, and Turbin, who argue that while women were more difficult to organize, once organized they could be much more militant than men (see Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work (New York, 1982) and Carole Turbin, "Beyond Conventional Wisdom: Women's Wage Work, Household Economic Contribution, and Labor Activism in a Mid-Nineteenth Century Working Class Community," in Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, eds., To Toil the Livelong Day (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 58). But it is equally likely that the membership of the local does not reflect the composition of the local industry; in that case, this finding would suggest that male workers had an additional incentive to maintain organization when the threat of female substitution was great. To get a rough indication of which interpretation fits the evidence, I generated a list of all less-skilled locals that survived five years or longer and identified the eight of these that were located in local industries with higher than average percentages of females. I then matched these with the membership data on the locals given in the 1887 Report of the New Jersey Bureau of Labor Statistics. Of these eight locals, one was an exclusively female local, four had some female representation (varying from a low of 5 percent to a high of 29 percent), one had no female members, and two could not be matched. Thus, it appears that the coefficient for per cent female should be interpreted as indicating that locals with female members tended to survive longer.

34. Bonnett, 1956; F.W. Hilbert, "Employers' Associations in the United States," in Jacob H. Hollander and George Barnett, eds., Studies in American Trade Unionism (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1906).

35. James Holt, "Trade Unionism in the British and U.S. Steel Industries, 1880-1914: A Comparative Study," Labor History, 18 (Winter, 1977).
36. Sanford Jacoby, Managing the Workplace: A New Approach to Industrial History (New York: Columbia University Press), forthcoming.
37. Gerald Friedman, "The Decline of Paternalism and the Making of the Employer Class, France, 1870-1914," forthcoming in Sanford Jacoby, ed., Managing the Workplace.
38. See Clarence Bonnett, Employers Associations in the United States (New York: Vantage, 1956).
39. Gerald Friedman, "The State and the Making of the Working Class: France and the United States, 1880-1914," Theory and Society, forthcoming, and Center for Studies of Social Change Working Paper, number 44b (July, 1987).
40. see also Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, Strikes in France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 28-45.
41. In New Jersey the only federal intervention in this period occurred in the course of the Knights' 1887 general strike against the coal companies. The courts put the railroads into receivership, and then used the receivership as a way of protecting strikebreakers. Workers saw this intervention as merely one more trick of the corrupt, monopolistic railroads; they did not view it as state action. Similarly, available evidence suggests that injunctions were sometimes threatened but rarely actually used.
42. Samuel H. Poper, "Newark N.J., 1870-1910: Chapters in the Evolution of an American Metropolis," Unpublished PhD dissertation, New York University, 1951, 61-2.
43. Poper, 1951: 28-29.
44. Susan E. Hirsch, The Roots of the American Working Class (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 31.
45. Victor S. Clark, History of Manufactures in the United States (New York, Mc-Graw Hill, 1929 [reprinted 1949]), Vol. II, 465.
46. US Census Office, Twelfth Census of the United States: Special Reports, Employees and Wages (Washington, 1903); US Senate, Cost of Living in American towns: Report of an Inquiry by the Board of Trade of London (62nd Congress, Document 222, 1911), 302.
47. (Newark Evening News [hereafter NEN], 5/9/87; Hirsch, 30.
48. Poper, 1951, 131-2; Charles Stephenson, "The Process of Community, Class, Culture, and Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century Newark," pp. 94-132 in Paul A. Stellhorn, New Jersey's Ethnic Heritage (Trenton: New Jersey



Historical Commission, 1978), 109-127.

49. Stephenson, 124-127; Poper, 27-8.

50. Hirsch, 134.

51. This statement based on the fact of later socialist participation in LA 1364.

52. For example, the early delegates to the State Labor Congress included a shoemaker, a sawmaker, a cigarmaker, and a printer.

53. Indeed, some scholars like Ira Kerrison believe that the KOL virtually took over the Trades Assembly. (See the organization file, Kerrison Papers, Rutgers University). But whether or not the Knights actually controlled the Trades Assembly, there is no doubt that they played an important role in it through 1889, when mounting tension between the AFL and the Knights led the Trades Assembly to expel Knights' locals.

54. Jonathan Garlock and N.C. Builder, Knights of Labor Data Bank," Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, Ann Arbor, 1973; study data.

55. NEN, 4/26/84; NEN 4/28/84.

56. NJBSLI, 1888: 170; NEN, 11/26/1887.

57. Garlock and Builder; study data.

58. NEN, 8/13/1885.

59. NEN, 6/12/1888; United States Bureau of Labor, The Third Annual Report: Strikes and Lockouts (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1888), 332-342.

60. NEN, 4/22/1886.

61. Nearly one-half of all strikes in 1886 involved less-skilled workers; United States Bureau of Labor, 332-342.

62. NEN 5/10/86.

63. The use of sub-bosses in leather factories had long been a major complaint. See the comments by the Newark Japanner, NJBSLI, Eighth Annual Report (Trenton, 1885), 252 and by the leather worker, NJBSLI, Ninth Annual Report (Trenton, 1886), 222 and 224.

64. NEN, 5/11/86.

65. NEN, 1/5/87; NJBILS, 1887: 258-261.

66. NEN, 1/6/87 1/7/87; New York Times 1/7/87.

67. NEN 8/13/85.

68. Elizabeth Daily Journal, 3/15/86.

69. NJBSLI, 1887: 202.

70. Little is known about the activities of the SLP in Newark. The party was mentioned in the local press only when it did something unusually public, such as sponsoring a speech by a nationally prominent socialist, or bringing a red flag to the labor day parade.

71. Dowdall was a well-loved Newark labor leader and very active in the effort to organize the unorganized in Essex County. He was probably a Knights' sympathizer, if not a member, long before the hat finishers affiliated with the Knights in 1885. (For information on the hat finishers and their affiliation with the Knights, see David Bensmen, The Practice of Solidarity: American Hat Finishers in the Nineteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

When Dowdall was nominated for the newly created position of factory inspector in 1884, the New York Times called him "a labor extremist" a "demagogue" and "altogether an unfit person." (Quoted in Herbert Gutman, Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, (New York: Knopf, 1976), 281.

72. NEN, 4/16/85.

73. NEN, 8/13/1885.

74. Two other groups were also excluded from the parade: socialists and politicians. More precisely, socialist workers who wanted to march had to do so under the auspices of their labor unions and were prevented from carrying the red flag ("[t]his year the stars and stripes will be the only flag allowed to be displayed"), while the ban on politicians, which was rigidly enforced against the Governor of New Jersey and the Mayor of Newark (whose carriage was ordered out of the parade line and sent directly to the park), was not extended to Henry George, labor's candidate for the Mayor of New York. The inconsistencies in the application of the prohibitions are revealing. In the case of the socialists, both the Knights and the Trades Assembly were concerned about maintaining unity with those groups (largely German workers) who looked favorably upon socialist ideas, but they also wanted to avoid the disapproval that open acceptance of socialist ideology would entail. Especially following the public hysteria surrounding the Haymarket Bombing, both the Trades Assembly and DA 51 wanted to distance their organizations from "the Red Flag." (This despite socialist membership in the Knights, and hence, by representation, in the TA) As for politicians, the Knights as Leon Fink has noted, were in the anomalous position of telling workers to "organize, co-operate, educate till the stars and stripes wave over a contented and happy people" while simultaneously warning them to "let political parties and political clubs, of whatever

name, severely alone" (p. 25) Newark workers attempted to reconcile the contradictory demands by defining it away: labor's candidates were not politicians.

75. Perlman, 1918, 414.

76. Employers Associations file, study data; Bonnett, 1956; NEN, 5/17/1886.

77. Bonnett, 258; on the Board of Trade, see Poper, 79-88.

78. For example, see the speech by Charles Litchman reported in the NEN, 8/25/1887.

79. The arguments over political action followed the campaign of two labor candidates in the 1886 election. With little preparation, the Trades Assembly sponsored two labor candidates -- one (a Knight's member whose platform was the Order's Declaration of Principles) for a congressional seat, and one for a state assembly seat (NJBSLI, 1887: NEN, 11/03/1886). The assembly candidate lost by a mere six votes and the congressional candidate (whose opponents included Newark's Mayor and the incumbent congressman) came in third with 16% of the vote (NEN, 11/3/1886). Given the circumstances, both candidates placed respectably, but nonetheless the electoral loss precipitated acrimonious debates over political action in several meetings of the Trades Assembly, as well as the withdrawal of three craft unions (NEN, 11/11/1886).

Conflicts over trade autonomy were precipitated, as elsewhere, by the growing hostility between the International Cigar Makers Union and the national leaders of the Knights. The trouble had begun with a split in a New York City local of the International, and led eventually to the creation of rival national union, the German socialist Progressive Cigarmakers. The dissident local favored the organization of unskilled tenement workers, while the International sought to outlaw tenement cigars. When the Progressives temporarily joined the Knights to combine forces against the International in 1886, the International began rallying discontented craft unions in other trades against the Knights. Initially, there were half-hearted attempts at conciliation on both sides, but an open break came in February when Powderly ordered immediate enforcement of a resolution, passed at the Knights General Assembly the previous fall, outlawing dual membership in the Knights of Labor and International Cigarmakers. (Both Ware, 1929 and Perlman, 1926: 398-402 have accounts of the national dispute).

There were two local assemblies of cigar workers in Newark (LA 3044 and LA 6040) and many, if not all of their members, were also members of the International Cigarmakers Union. Because of its proximity to New York City, Newark cigarmakers were parties to the daily ins and outs of the dispute. Nonetheless, Knights and Trade Assembly leaders were able to keep the conflict from spilling over to the local labor movement until February 1887. But when it did spill over, it was a source of bitter debate, and tended to pit many German workers (who supported the ICMU)

against the Knights (NEN, 2/24/1887, 2/26/1887, 3/3/1887, 3/23/1887, 3/31/1887, 4/7/1887; John Swinton's Paper, 2/27/1887 [but local sources contradict this report], 3/6/1887. Although a face saving compromise was eventually worked out whereby ICMU members could rejoin the Knights, this came only after the collapse of one local assembly, a loss of membership from many others, and lasting tension in the Trades Assembly over the issue of trade autonomy.

The continuing debate over Haymarket, the fairness of the trial, and calls for clemency when the death sentence was imposed, also exacerbated tensions among Newark's workers, although not to the extent they did in other cities (see, for example, Oestreicher's discussion of the devastating impact in Detroit, pp. 199-211).

80. There are no reliable membership statistics for late 1886, or early 1887, so it is difficult to document the timing and scope of the membership loss. NJBSLI reports that there were 7,000 members at end of 1887. The General Assembly Proceedings put the membership of DA 51 (in good standing) at 4,766 in July 87, but this certainly underestimates Newark total Knights memberships both because several locals were by then affiliated with NTAs, and because other locals were behind in their dues.

81. As in Detroit, the consequences of each dispute caused dissention within each faction of the labor movement as often as it pitted one organization or ethnic group against another.

82. Some cigar workers stayed with the Knights by becoming members of LA 1364.

83. Some accounts suggest that an employers association was organized in 1886 (Bonnett is confusing on this, see p. 279). And in the Knights account of the 1887 lockout, they say that the 1887 agreement was negotiated with the Leather Manufacturers Association (note, not the NJMAN).

84. NEN, 8/11/1887.

85. NEN, 6/8/1887; NJBSLI, 1888: 228-229; Journal of United Labor, 9/24/1887, Perlman, 1918: 415.

86. NEN, 6/11/1887, 7/25/1887; NJBSLI, 1887: 258-261.

87. Evidence that the LMANJ was having trouble recruiting employers can be found in the NEN 5/9/1887. J.H. Halsey told the reporter that "[t]he manufacturers also organized a short time ago and wanted us [Halsey and his partner] to join them... We thought we had better paddle our own canoe, and declined to join."

88. NEN, 7/14/1887.

89. NEN, 7/14/1887; John Swinton's Paper, 7/31/1887; NJBSLI, 1888: 228-229.
90. NEN, 7/26/1887.
91. NEN, 7/28/1887.
92. NEN, 7/26/1887, 7/27/1887. This estimate seems high; in the actual course of strike, no where near that amount was raised.
93. NEN, 7/27/1887, 7/28/1887.
94. NEN, 8/1/1887, 8/2/1887, 8/3/1887.
95. NEN, 8/4/1887.
96. It is difficult to get reliable statistics on the number of workers who actually went out in the two shops because this itself became a source of constant dispute in the newspapers. On August 8, the Knights reported that all but 14 of the 250 employees struck at T.P. Howell's shop, and 70 out of 73 men struck Patrick Reilly & Sons. The employers denied this, Howell claiming that half his men were at work (NEN, 8/8/1887). There was probably some exaggeration on both sides, although, at least initially, it appears that the employers were exaggerating more. After all, they flatly refused to let employers look in their shops despite the fact that if they were telling the truth, they had every reason to have this reported. Additionally, it is known that they went to great lengths to obtain strikebreakers. Overall, the NJBSLI reports that 1255 workers struck/were locked-out of a work force of 1,800 (1888: 260-61).
97. NEN, 8/8/1887.
98. NEN, 8/11/1887; New Brunswick Daily Home News, 8/8/1887, 8/11/1887.
99. New Brunswick Daily Home News, 8/11/1887; NEN, 8/15/1887.
100. NEN, 8/11/1887; 8/23/1887.
101. NEN, 8/29/1887.
102. Poper, 73.
103. NJBSLI, 1888: 42-46.
104. NEN, 8/16/1887.
105. One of the manufacturers who never joined the LMANJ told the Newark Evening News on August 11 that the owners of Geo. A. Halsey, T.P. Howell, and Blanchard Bros. and Lane had initiated the LMANJ. George Halsey, while T.P. Howell was already exporting more patent leather than all other manufacturers in the United States combined in 1870, and

Blanchard Bros. and Lane's workers employed nearly 900 men in 1887, making it one of the largest employers in Newark (Paper, 25; New Brunswick Daily Home News, 8/11/1887).

106. NEN, 8/9/1887, 8/10/1887.

107. NEN, 8/10/1887.

108. NEN, 8/11/1887.

109. NJBSLI, 1888: 258-261.

110. NEN, 8/15/1887.

111. NEN, 8/11/1887; 8/15/1887; 8/19/1887. In 1885, Congress had passed a contract labor law after heavy lobbying by labor. It prevented employers from importing workers under contract to the United States. On August 15 the LMANJ told reporters that it wait until the European workers it was hiring as strikebreakers were in the United States before it asked them to sign a contract. That way, it would avoid problems with contract labor laws. But on August 19, Knights' members were able to convince the Commissioner of Immigration to prevent six workers from entering the country because of suspected contract labor law violations. On August 24, the manufacturers retaliated against the Immigration Officers by filing a grievance against them for aiding the Knights (NEB, 8/24/1887).

112. NEN, 8/20/1887.

113. NEN, 8/25/1887.

114. NJBSLI, 1888: 258-261.

115. NEN, 8/29/1887.

116. NEN, 9/2/1887.

117. NJBILS, 1888: 258-61.

118. NJBSLI, 1888: 231. The decline of the Trades Assembly is chronicled in the Newark Evening News throughout 1888 and early 1889; and the disarray of the Knights strike efforts are evident especially in accounts of the brewers strike that occurred in April 1888 (see the Newark Evening News and the New Jersey Unionist for that month).

119. David Landes, The Unbound Prometheus; Patrick O'Brien and Caglar Keyder, Economic Growth in Britain and France 1780-1914 (London: George Allen & Unwin).

Table 1 : Knights of Labor Membership in New Jersey By Industry, 1887<sup>1</sup>

	Num- ber of Assem- blies	Per Cent of Total	Mem- ber- ship	Per Cent of Total
<u>Trade Assemblies</u>				
Manufacturing	140	59.1	24,658	61.2
Food, Drink, Tobacco	11	4.6	867	2.2
Apparel	10	4.2	1914	4.7
Transportation equipment	4	1.7	721	1.8
Chemical, glass, rubber, clay and stone products	27	11.4	3840	9.5
Lumber and wood products	1	.5	50	.1
Textiles	27	11.4	6598	16.4
Printing and Engraving	1	.5	37	.1
Leather and shoes	15	6.3	2907	7.2
Machinery and metal products	38	16.0	6750	16.8
Paper and paper products	2	.8	69	.2
Misc. manufacturing	4	1.7	905	2.2
Non-Manufacturing	39	16.4	4162	10.4
Building	14	5.9	1536	3.8
Transportation	18	7.6	2005	5.0
(Railways) <sup>2</sup>	(9)	(3.8)	(996)	(2.5)
Services	4	1.7	464	1.2
Retail and wholesale trade	3	1.2	157	.4
<u>Mixed Assemblies</u>	58	24.5	11455	28.4
(Manufacturing) <sup>3</sup>			(4439)	(11.0)
(Non-manufacturing) <sup>4</sup>			(1680)	(4.2)
(Laborers) <sup>5</sup>			(2147)	(5.3)
(Occupations not reported) <sup>6</sup>			(3189)	(7.9)
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2377</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>402758</b>	<b>100.0</b>

1 Adapted from NJBSLI, 1888: 28 and 30; and Troy, 1965: 48.

2 Included in transportation.

Table 2  
Rate of Failure of Skilled Knights of Labor Locals, (1880-1895)

Independent Variables	Reduced Model		
	Coef.	Standard error	exp(coef.)
Constant	-6.74*	2.66	
<u>Industrial Factors</u>			
Wage Differential			
Number of Establishments	-.11	.22	.90
Establishment Size	-.0022	.0020	.998
Technological Change	-.88 *	.39	.42
Capital to Labor ratio	.17 *	.08	1.18
Percent Females			
Employers' Association	.90 *	.41	2.47
<u>Community Factors</u>			
Population	.40	.28	1.50
One-Industry Town	1.45 *	.62	4.28
Ethnic Diversity			
Election Victory	-.78	.65	.46
<u>Organizational Factors</u>			
KOL Craft Assem.in Local Industry			
KOL Craft Assem. in Community	.66	.45	1.93
KOL Less-skilled in Local Industry			
KOL Less-skilled in Community			
Trade Union Craft in Local Industry			
Trade Union Craft in Community			
<u>Time Factors</u>			
Prior 1887?	-.60	.40	.55
<u>National Factors</u>			
National KOL Death Rate	.0012 *	.0005	1.001

\*p<.05 two-tailed test

Overall Chi2 of reduced model is 35.65 with 10 degrees of freedom (significant at the .001 level). Number of local assemblies.(N) = 45.



Table 3  
Rate of Failure of Less-Skilled Knights of Labor Locals, (1880-1895)

Independent Variables	1880-1886 Time Period		1887-1895 Time Period	
	Coef.	Standard error	Coef.	Standard error
Constant	- 2.06**	.78	-1.16**	.38
Wage Differential	.42*	.17 (1.52)		
Number of Establishments	- .27**	.09 (.77)		
Establishment Size	- .008**	.003 (.99)	.004**	.001(1.004)
Technological Change				
Capital to Labor ratio				
Percent Females	.91	1.12 (2.48)	-1.76**	.64(.17)
Employers' Association	-2.50*	1.06 (.08)	.52*	.26(1.68)
Population				
One-Industry Town	- .38	.57	- .86**	.24(.42)
Ethnic Diversity				
Election Victory	.21	.45	.70	.63(2.0)
KOL Craft Assem.in Local Ind.	-.46	.48	-.78**	.29(.46)
KOL Craft Assem. in Community				
KOL Less-skilled in Community				
KOL Less-skilled in Local Ind	2.50 **	.54 (12.2)	.36	.23
Trade Union Craft in Community				
Trade Union Craft in Local Ind.				
National KOL Death Rate	- .000	.001	.001**	.00(1.001)

\*p<.05 two-tailed test; \*\*p<.01 two-tailed test

Overall Chi2 value for model is 102.7 with 18 degrees of freedom (significant at the .001 level). Number of Assemblies (N) = 149. The coefficients for wage differential and number of establishments were constrained to be the same in the two time periods. (Antilogs for significant variables are given in parentheses.)

Table 4: Summary of Factors Affecting the Founding and Survival of Knights of Labor Local Assemblies

	<u>Less-Skilled Locals</u>				<u>Skilled Locals</u>
	<u>Founding</u>		<u>Survival</u>		<u>Survival</u>
	1880-1886	1887-1895	1880-1886	1887-1895	
<u>Factors</u>					
<u>Industrial Factors</u>					
Wage Differential			--	--	
Number of Establishments	+++	+++	+++	+++	+
Establishment Size	+++	+++	+++	---	+
Technological Change	+++	+++			++
Horse Power/Wrk. 1880					
Capital to Labor ratio	-	-			--
Percent Females			-	+++	
Employers' Association			++	--	--
<u>Community Factors</u>					
Population	++	++			-
One-Industry Town			+	+++	--
Ethnic Diversity					
Election Victory			-	-	+
<u>Organizational Factors</u>					
KOL Craft Assembly in Local Industry	-	+++	+	+++	
KOL Craft Assembly in Community	+++	+			-
KOL Less-skilled in Local Industry			---	-	
KOL Less-skilled assembly in Community	+				
Trade Union Craft Local in Local Indus					
Trade Union Craft Local in Community	-	-			
Trade Union Less-skilled in Local Industry					
Trade Union Less-skilled in Community		+			
National KOL Death Rate			+	--	--
(Prior 1887?)					+

Note. -- The entries in the table are the signs of coefficients in reduced models of the rate of founding and survival of Knights of Labor local assemblies. The "Survival" columns reproduce the information in Tables 2 and 3, the only difference is that the signs are reversed here so that the entry shows the relationship of the factor in column 1 to the survival of Knights of Labor local assemblies. The "Founding" column reproduces information found in Voss, forthcoming.

+ or - = sign of non-significant coefficient in reduced model  
 ++ or -- = sign of coefficient in reduced model, significant at the .05 level.  
 +++ or --- = sign of coefficient in reduced model, significant at the .01 level.