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# Manufacturing Progress, Prosperity, and Pride The Social Construction of Worcester's Industrial Identity, 1850-1910

Michael T. DeSantis '18

“Worcester is essentially a manufacturing city, and, as such, one of the most important of American cities...The industrial life of the city has beat with strong, unfaltering pulsation through the years that have passed. The character and intelligence of the people have made Worcester what she is: Foremost among manufacturing cities; first among American inland cities.”

—Worcester Board of Trade, 1906<sup>1</sup>

As the midpoint of the nineteenth century approached, several ongoing changes forced the residents of Worcester, Massachusetts, to reconsider their city's identity with regards to its economic activity. From its very founding, Worcester fashioned itself as a town friendly to tradesmen. However, the emerging realities of social and economic life made this identity untenable. The city's population more than quadrupled from 1830 to 1850, growing from just over 4,000 in 1830 to around 7,500 in 1840 and 17,000 in 1850.<sup>2</sup> Because of this expanding population, the former town

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<sup>1</sup> Worcester Board of Trade, *Worcester, Her Worth, Her Works: A Descriptive Manual of A Great Manufacturing City* (Worcester, MA: Press of the Felt Print, 1906), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Population data from federal census.

of Worcester officially became incorporated as a city in 1848. The transition from small, rural town to burgeoning urban center meant that in Worcester, like nearby Springfield, the experience of community “was changing from an informal, direct sensation to a formal, perceived abstraction.”<sup>3</sup> This left one important question unanswered: what form would this “perceived abstraction” of the Worcester community take? Considering Worcester’s rise as a city resulted almost entirely from industrial development and many locals had long prided themselves on the city’s craftsmanship, the obvious answer was that of a manufacturing city. As the opening quotation from the Worcester Board of Trade suggests, Worcester would eventually become primarily known as an industrial city that took pride in its productive capacity.

However, Worcester’s industry-driven growth into a city occurred at a time when Americans already possessed an abstract notion of “manufacturing cities,” one that bore a series of almost exclusively negative moral and social connotations. In part, Americans feared manufacturing cities because of accounts that described conditions in English industrial centers, such as Manchester and Liverpool, as being both physically debased and morally corrupt. Americans believed that the concentration of large numbers of poorly educated workers in cities would lead these people to engage in a range of vices that violated Protestant Christian codes of propriety. Adding to the moral quandary of industrial development was the fact that the form and function of manufacturing cities appeared to be at odds with the grand republican experiment of the early United States. In many ways, the Jeffersonian ideal of a decentralized agrarian republic of yeoman farmers represented the opposite of manufacturing cities with their capital-holding industrialists and concentrated working-class populations.

As a result, anxieties and uncertainties about the moral implications of life in manufacturing cities delayed the emergence of an industrial identity in Worcester. Over time, newspaper writers, business people, advertisers, and other commentators in Worcester managed local anxieties about the transition towards an urbanized industrial economy and society by positively redefining the term “manufacturing city.” Through the careful construction of narratives about Worcester as a “manufacturing city,” writers developed an industrial identity for the city that aligned with the evolving American vision of the republican nation. These commentators claimed that industrial development would produce social progress, material prosperity, moral propriety, and community pride for all Worcesterites. But, in doing so, these narratives obscured the class divisions in the local community that unequally distributed the economic benefits of industrialization.

<sup>3</sup> Michael H. Frisch, *Town Into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 247.

### Prologue: Material and Moral Anxieties about "Manufacturing Cities" in Worcester, 1829-1850

Worcester newspapers expressed fears about the physical conditions of "manufacturing cities" based upon images of such cities in England that were widely distributed in the United States. In 1832, the *National Aegis* described the working conditions in England as "an atmosphere loaded with the smoke and exhalations of a large manufacturing city."<sup>4</sup> Not only was such an atmosphere aesthetically displeasing, but it was also a danger to the inhabitants' health because city life forced the English working class to be "crowded into one dense mass, in cottages separated by narrow, unpaved, and almost pestilential streets."<sup>5</sup> The wellbeing of workers represented the Worcester newspaper's main concern about life in English manufacturing cities, which is unsurprising considering local conceptions of labor emphasized the dignity and material prosperity of working people.

In addition to the polluted atmospheres and crowded housing units of centralized manufacturing cities, the *Aegis* also expressed fears about working conditions in these cities' large factories. As with the state of cities themselves, the *Aegis* worried that large factories possessed displeasing and dangerous physical conditions. The newspaper wrote that urban English workers "are congregated in rooms and workshops during twelve hours in the day, in an enervating, heated atmosphere, which is frequently loaded with dust or filaments of cotton, or impure from constant respiration, or from other causes."<sup>6</sup> The *Aegis* also underscored that factory work was dehumanizing by its very nature, saying that factory workers were "engaged in an employment which absorbs their attention, and unremittingly employs their physical energies."<sup>7</sup> The total sacrifice to the whims of the factory caused anxieties because it challenged the prevailing belief in Worcester, demonstrated by the tenets of the Worcester Mechanics Association, that workers should live well-rounded lives with opportunities for education, recreation, and religious worship. Such a view also would have made it difficult for any Worcesterites who believed the *Aegis'* view of English manufacturing cities to desire for the town of Worcester to grow into such a place.

While the Worcester press expressed serious concerns about the material and labor conditions in manufacturing cities, local newspapers were most troubled by the supposed corrupting influence of these material conditions on workers living in emerging cities. Once again, the Worcester press first expressed their fears while discussing English manufacturing cities. In 1829, the *Massachusetts Spy*, a Worcester newspaper, described these new urban centers as "vast manufacturing cities in which

<sup>4</sup> "Workmen in England," *National Aegis*, Aug. 1, 1832, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the laboring classes are collected together, forming the crowded population, which is always favorable in commercial as well as manufacturing cities to the increase of immorality and vice.”<sup>8</sup> Similar connections that linked the crowded population of manufacturing cities to an increase in general immorality appeared repeatedly in the Worcester press, as well as other American newspapers, over the next three decades. During this period, the threat of the morally corrupting influence of manufacturing cities took on a new urgency with the emergence of nearby Lowell as a large-scale industrial center with sizable factories. *National Aegis* in 1839 ran a report on Lowell which said, “The progress of this manufacturing City [*sic*] must be viewed with great interest and some anxiety,” because the working people in the city resembled “a class of people that in other countries have been led by their conditions into depraved habits.”<sup>9</sup>

In Lowell, industrialists dealt with the potential corrupting influences of industrialization by hiring a workforce comprised almost entirely of young, single women. Factory owners employed individual women from the surrounding area for a few short years at a time in order to create a high rate of turnover that prevented the city from developing the type of entrenched proletariat vilified in accounts of English manufacturing cities.<sup>10</sup> Despite some fears about the ways in which factory work undermined traditional notions of womanhood, the Lowell strategy of hiring women generally received praise for its supposed role in maintaining the city’s virtue. As Jocelyn M. Boryczka writes, “Owing largely to the moral excellence of these female workers, foreign visitors such as Charles Dickens, Harriet Martineau, and Michel Chevalier depicted Lowell as superior to the corrupt, degraded, miserable conditions of European industrial cities such as Manchester, England.”<sup>11</sup> However, the structure of social and economic life prevented Worcesterites from following a similar approach since Worcester was a residential community with mechanics shops far smaller than the massive Lowell textiles mills. Worcesterites needed a way to assuage anxieties that they themselves would become morally corrupted as their city continued to grow both in terms of population and industrial output.

The Worcester press responded to fears over the potential of manufacturing cities to morally corrupt their large working-class populations by suggesting several ways that American society could manage the corrupting influences of industrialization. Before Worcester’s own growth into a city, local newspapers suggested that the immorality of densely populated industrial cities could be avoided by maintaining an economic and social structure in which manufacturing operations and the population were physically dispersed. The *Spy* noted that American industrial

<sup>8</sup> “Manufacturers,” *Massachusetts Spy*, May 13, 1829, 1.

<sup>9</sup> “Lowell,” *National Aegis*, Jan. 23, 1839, 2.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 69-70.

<sup>11</sup> Jocelyn M. Boryczka, “The Virtues of Vice: The Lowell Mill Girl Debate and Contemporary Feminist Ethics,” *Feminist Theory* 7, no. 1 (April 1, 2006): 49.

development was following this trajectory in the same article in which it posited that the crowding of populations into English manufacturing cities led to “the increase of immorality and vice.” The *Spy* wrote, “The manufacturing operations in the United States are all carried on in little hamlets, which often appear to spring up in the bosom of some forest, gathered around the water fall [*sic*] that serves to turn the mill wheel.”<sup>12</sup> Although it did not possess a water fall or natural water source to power its industry like the idyllic forest towns described by the *Spy*, Worcester resembled one of these “little hamlets” in size when this article appeared in 1829. Officially still a town, the municipality’s population had just reached approximately 4,000 residents.<sup>13</sup>

The *Spy* believed that a small population such as this could prevent the widespread immorality associated with large urban areas. Manufacturing cities, according to the *Spy*, dispersed responsibility for enforcing moral standards in the community, whereas there existed a “marked ignominy that is usually visited so heavily upon the guilty in the narrow circle of a small community or country village.”<sup>14</sup> The notion that American industrial development should be centered in small communities extended beyond Worcester in the decades before the Civil War. Eric Foner has demonstrated that the Republican Party of the 1850’s also “believed that industrial development should take place within the context of the society with which they were familiar” and that party members therefore “rejected the idea that industrialization and the rise of great cities and large factories necessarily went hand in hand.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the belief in a dispersed, town-based industrial development could only assuage fears about the immorality associated with manufacturing cities as long as Worcester remained a town.

In 1839, the *National Aegis* put forth a more sustainable view for managing the immorality associated with manufacturing cities. Discussing the growth of Lowell and the potential for this development to corrupt the working-class of the city, the *Aegis* said, “How far the influence of republican principles and habits may tend to elevate the condition and sustain the self-respect of a class of people that in other countries have been led by their conditions into depraved habits, remains to be determined.”<sup>16</sup> Again, the Worcester press demonstrated the widespread influence of republican ideology and the belief that practices derived from such an ideology served as a path towards moral behavior. Although the *Aegis* did not explicitly state the ways in which “republican principles” would help the residents of manufacturing cities lead moral lives, seemingly the most important of these values were self-

<sup>12</sup> “Manufacturers,” *Massachusetts Spy*, May 13, 1829, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Population data from federal census.

<sup>14</sup> “Manufacturers,” *Massachusetts Spy*, May 13, 1829, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 36.

<sup>16</sup> “Lowell,” *National Aegis*, Jan. 23, 1839, 2.

restraint and the ability of individual citizens to resist the supposed temptations of densely populated urban areas. According to various Worcester newspapers of the era, urban residents required self-restraint to resist the temptation to engage in a variety of behaviors found in manufacturing cities including a self-indulgent pursuit of monetary wealth, theft, excessive consumption of alcohol, violence, and idleness.<sup>17</sup> The new focus on republican principles and self-restraint, though still uniquely American in nature, represented a more sustainable vision for preventing the immorality associated with English manufacturing cities in Worcester as it grew into a manufacturing city itself.

### **The Pursuit of Progress Legitimizes Worcester's Emergence as a "Manufacturing City"**

Interestingly enough, local newspapers and other writers generally discussed the emergence of Worcester as a manufacturing city in positive terms by praising the moral qualities supposedly required to ensure this prosperity. Only a few years after the incorporation of Worcester as a city, the *Spy* predicted in 1851, "At no distant day, Worcester is destined to be one of the most important manufacturing cities in the Union."<sup>18</sup> The *Spy* spent much of the early 1850s printing similar articles which lauded the growth of manufacturing industries in Worcester. This represented a noticeable metamorphosis in the *Spy's* position on manufacturing cities. The *Spy* celebrated industrial development for its "important" contributions to the advancement of the material wellbeing of society. The evolution in the *Spy's* thinking about industrialization reflected a similar evolution in the ideology of the Republican Party.

The best example of the *Spy's* early efforts to promote Worcester industry, the five-piece "Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves" series, also appeared in 1851. Printed between April 30 and June 9, 1851, the series highlighted five prominent manufacturing companies in the young city. These articles represented a liminal phase in the discursive development of the city's industrial identity. Although the series, like other accounts published in the 1850s, did not yet christen Worcester as a "manufacturing city," they prepared the way for the local community to accept the label as a self-defined point of pride rather than a pejorative imposed by outsiders. The "Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves" series highlighted the existence and diversity of manufacturing firms across the city. The series demonstrated to the Worcester community that these industries were important and worthy of recognition both through the narratives contained within the stories and, more simply, through the very act of committing five front-page articles to city's manufacturers. Further, the series made the developing industrial character of the city appealing by emphasizing

<sup>17</sup> See "A Tale of Crime," *National Aegis*, Jan. 1, 1851, 1; "Out-Door Amusements," *National Aegis*, Oct. 15, 1856, 1; "A Paradise for Mechanics," *Worcester Palladium*, Sept. 11, 1867, 2.

<sup>18</sup> "Public Spirit," *Massachusetts Spy*, June 4, 1851, 2.

two supposed benefits of the city's manufacturing interests: "progress" and "prosperity." These two intertwined narratives reflected the allegiance of the *Spy* to the Republican Party and an embrace of the latest development in the Party's thinking about industry.<sup>19</sup> As Eric Foner says, the Republican Party of the 1850s came to view industrialization as essential to the economic growth of the United States and adopted the related "view that for a society as for individuals, economic progress was a measure of moral worth."<sup>20</sup> The progress and prosperity narratives of Worcester's industrial development came to dominate histories and descriptions of Worcester during the latter half of the nineteenth century, eventually becoming inseparable from local ideas about the city and its identity.

In the progress narrative, writers positioned the manufacturing industry as the city's main source of growth, both in terms of size and in terms of importance. In fact, the "Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves" series began by framing the surprising industrial development of the inland city in terms of progress:

Strangers visiting Worcester, often ask the question of its denizens—"What do the people do here." To visitors accustomed to associate all their ideas of business with salt water and waterfalls—with the white sails of commerce and the ponderous roll of giant water-wheels, it is always a matter of surprise that an inland town like Worcester should show such indications of thrift and prosperity, that its business should be continually on the increase, and the quiet stillness of its rural environs should be constantly encroached upon by the march of improvement, and the din of business.<sup>21</sup>

As first articulated by the *Spy*, the Worcester press came to view the manufacturing industry as the driving force in the development of Worcester.

According to the "Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves" series, the progress of industry in Worcester possessed importance because it not only led to the further growth of the city but also developments in technological and material rewards as well. For starters, the city's manufacturers directly contributed to the material wellbeing of people within but mostly outside Worcester by engaging in the "production of those articles of convenience and comfort which find a ready market everywhere."<sup>22</sup> Even when they did not purchase Worcester-made products themselves, the workers in Worcester benefitted. Workers and their families primarily benefitted from the growth of Worcester industries by securing wages on which they could support their families. The series made note of the number of people whose livelihoods were supported by each of the profiled manufacturing firms with statements such as "[the business] keeps the pot boiling for some fifty or more thriving families"<sup>23</sup> and "The establishment gives employment at the present time to about one hundred men in

<sup>19</sup> Foner calls the *Spy* a "radical" Republican newspaper on p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> "Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves, No. 1: Bradley's Car Shop," *Worcester Daily Spy*, Apr. 30, 1851.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves, No. 4: The Carriage Builders," *Worcester Daily Spy*, May 9, 1851.

all the various departments, most of whom have families, and whose wages average higher than that of workmen engaged in most of the mechanical trades elsewhere.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, the “Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves” series helped craft an early version of the prosperity narrative of Worcester’s development. In this narrative that would become ubiquitous in accounts about Worcester by the end of the century, commentators claimed that the manufacturing industry provided the city of Worcester and its residents of all classes with not only essential material goods but also with some respectable amount of material luxury not found in other locales.

However, in the eyes of the *Spy*, Worcesterites did not simply reap the benefits of the city’s industrial development. Instead, the “Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves” series consistently presented the city’s workers as the agents responsible for Worcester’s industrial and financial growth. The *Spy* explained the process through which Worcester gained prosperity from manufacturing by stating:

the prosperity of Worcester rests upon the strong arms and clear heads of her artizans [*sic*]; and that while they toil to shape from the crude forms of nature, from the ore of the mine and the timber of the forest, articles of comfort, convenience and luxury, for the markets of the world, for which the world is ready to pour into their homes, cash or its equivalent, in exchange, our city must go on prospering and to prosper.<sup>25</sup>

Notably, the *Spy* viewed the city’s “artisans” as the agents of Worcester’s growth in the early 1850s at which point the city’s economy was still dominated by craftsmen and their small shops. As we will see, later narratives would position elites such as industrialists, capitalists, and traders as the agents responsible for Worcester’s development. As the agents of Worcester’s development in the early narrative presented in the “Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves” series, artisans possessed valuable moral attributes. The series described the positive moral influence of the city’s artisans and their work on the development of the city by writing, “the demand for their labor has been the means of attracting to our young and growing city an industrial population whose moral qualities have given to its character a high name in the calendar, for public spirit and private enterprise.”<sup>26</sup> Such qualities broke sharply from the vices associated with the “industrial population” in English manufacturing cities and demonstrated a shifting attitude towards acceptance of the industrial workers in Worcester.

The *Spy* did not view these emerging industries and its envisioned future of Worcester as a manufacturing city through the lens of fears and anxieties with which the *Aegis* had earlier observed the development of Lowell. Instead, the *Spy* explicitly argued that Worcester should embrace its industrial present and future. In fact, the

<sup>24</sup> “Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves, No. 1: Bradley’s Car Shop,” *Worcester Daily Spy*, Apr. 30, 1851.

<sup>25</sup> “Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves: Paper-Mill—Calico Printing, and Sewing Machines,” *Worcester Daily Spy*, June 9, 1851.

<sup>26</sup> “Worcester in its Shirt-sleeves, No. 3: The Court Mills Agricultural Implement Manufactory,” *Worcester Daily Spy*, May 8, 1851.

*Spy* printed its article to announce its support for the construction of a new industrial building and began the piece by saying, "We are glad to learn that the contemplated enterprise of erecting a spacious and substantial building for manufacturing purposes, and furnishing it with an engine of great power, meets with deserved encouragement from all quarters."<sup>27</sup> The *Spy* also lauded both Worcester's business climate at that moment as well as those who would be attracted to it by stating, "at the present time even, we believe there is scarcely another place which can offer so many inducements for men of industry and enterprise to settle."<sup>28</sup>

This represented a dramatic shift in the moral qualities associated with people drawn to urbanizing and industrializing cities like Worcester. Earlier articles expressed fears about the rise of immorality in manufacturing cities and claimed that such increases in immoral behavior resulted from large concentrations of working-class people. In contrast, the "men of industry and enterprise" which Worcester sought to attract to encourage industrial development would have been either businessmen with capital or master mechanics capable of starting their own small production shops. Both of these groups occupied higher positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy of the period with businessmen ranking among society's upper echelons and, as Bruce Laurie demonstrates, master mechanics formed a substantial portion of the period's middle class.<sup>29</sup> The *Spy*'s shifting of focus on the population growth associated with industrialization away from the working class and towards businessmen and mechanics both reflected and was made possible by Worcester's early industrial development as a small shop town.

The Worcester community's support for the proposed manufacturing building demonstrated a shift in attitude towards the industrial development of similarly great magnitude to that made by the local press. Even in past instances in which the local media had, if somewhat timidly, endorsed industrial progress, the newspapers revealed that other parties possessed much less enthusiastic support for industrial development. For example, the *Aegis*' article on Lowell's growth in 1839 deemed that the Lowell "experiment this far has been deemed satisfactory and encouraging" but noted that "many still look upon the system with distrust as unfavorable to the moral condition of the community."<sup>30</sup> Such early fears associated with manufacturing cities delayed Worcesterites embrace of the city's industrial nature and prevented them from developing a civic identity founded upon pride in the strength of local industry like that which would form in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, as the local community began to see the economic benefits that the city could derive

<sup>27</sup> "Public Spirit," *Massachusetts Spy*, June 4, 1851, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Bruce Laurie, "We Are Not Afraid to Work": Master Mechanics and the Market, Revolution in the Antebellum North," in *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class*, ed. Burton J. Bledstein and Robert D. Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2001), 51-52.

<sup>30</sup> "Public Spirit," *Massachusetts Spy*, June 4, 1851, 2.

from an increased manufacturing output, local businessmen began to support investment in the manufacturing industry and a positive industrial identity became a possibility for Worcester.

Thus, it became possible for the *National Aegis* to run a front-page article on April 11, 1863, that began by simply yet boldly declaring, “Worcester is a manufacturing city.”<sup>31</sup> The *Aegis* embraced the progress and prosperity narratives about Worcester that the *Spy* had outlined a decade earlier. Importantly, though, the *Aegis* went a step further by linking these two narratives to the “manufacturing city” label that the newspaper emphasized as the primary identity of Worcester. Immediately after labeling Worcester as a manufacturing city the *Aegis* asserted that the city’s “elements of growth depend mainly on the increase of new or enlargement of old manufactories. Deprive us of Union street and the junction, and the numerous factories that skirt Millbrook, and in the end you will deprive us of half our population.”<sup>32</sup> Like other early sources that attempted to reframe narratives about manufacturing positively, the *Aegis* now imbued this industry-driven progress with a noble character, one possessed by the residents of the city. “But it it [*sic*] is not corporation manufacturers that have built us up,” the paper noted. Rather, the *Aegis* stated, “The growth of Worcester is due to the energy of her own citizens and no capital from abroad comes in hither to give employment to labor and to put the chief profit into the pocket of the non-resident stockholder. All monies made here, remain.”<sup>33</sup> On an economic level, the local investment of capital in Worcester did, in fact, help contribute to the city’s rapid early economic development and industrialization.

On a discursive level, the *Aegis*’ emphasis on the local investment of capital suggested to readers that existing local capital holders viewed Worcester as a place deserving of loyalty and pride. More importantly, this narrative presented Worcester industrialists as benevolent stewards of the community. Like other New England business elites, Worcester’s industrialists saw investments in the local community as a public good and a civic duty. Historian John F. Kasson describes the ideology of the region’s capitalists through the specific example of the Boston Associates of Lowell, Massachusetts, and argues that these men:

were in fact both capitalists and concerned citizens, hard-dealing merchants and public-spirited philanthropists, entrepreneurs and ideologues. Even as they helped to transform New England’s economy, they sought to preserve a cohesive social order by adhering tenaciously to a rigorous code of ethics and responsibility. They took seriously their role as republican leaders, and the public turned to them for leadership.<sup>34</sup>

The *Aegis*’ account helped to transmit the industrialists’ self-image of themselves as

<sup>31</sup> “The Progress of Manufacturers,” *National Aegis*, Apr. 11, 1863, 1.

<sup>32</sup> “The Progress of Manufacturers,” *National Aegis*, Apr. 11, 1863, 1.

<sup>33</sup> “The Progress of Manufacturers,” *National Aegis*, Apr. 11, 1863, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Kasson, 71.

stewards of not only Worcester's moral character but also its republican underpinnings amidst the economic and social upheaval caused by industrialization.

Further, the *Aegis*' presentation of local investments by business elites helped to foster an idyllic understanding of the prosperity afforded to the city by industrialization that minimized class considerations and conflict. Essentially, the *Aegis* espoused an early version of the paternalistic nature of Worcester's manufacturing community by suggesting that investments by local economic elites provided employment and financial prosperity to all members of the community. Reflecting on the significance of Worcester's manufacturing establishments, the *Aegis* wrote, "Who can estimate their value and influence? It is not to be calculated in dollars and cents; for the domestic happiness of the millions of people, dependent upon manufactories for a living, is no branch of arithmetical calculations."<sup>35</sup> According to the *Aegis*, manufacturing workers did not merely depend on factories for a subsistence living, as in other countries such as England. Instead, these workers enjoyed high wages and a high quality of life. The *Aegis* described this luxurious material and social prosperity saying, "In no other country is wealth as generally diffused; in none other does the manufacturing workman enjoy such good wages, give such an education to his children, or have such an opening before him for mental development."<sup>36</sup> Just in case readers could not ascertain which group was to thank for the luxuries enjoyed by the local working-class, the *Aegis* finished by proclaiming, "All honor to manufactures! May the next ten years witness as great an increase as has the last."<sup>37</sup> With any potential class tensions between the city's labor force and its manufacturers now firmly eliminated in narratives about the city's source of wellbeing, manufacturing progress, and the prosperity it promised, was now the order of the day.

### Manufacturing's Progress at the Heart of the Commonwealth

The progress of manufacturing and, in turn, the acceptance of the city's identity as a city that made things continued well into the 1860s and beyond. Although some Worcesterites had initially resisted the "manufacturing city" label or viewed it with some distrust, it became one of the primary identities of Worcester in a relatively short period. In 1871, the *Aegis* printed an amusing piece that featured "a veritable 'composition' of a pupil in one of the public schools of this city."<sup>38</sup> The composition amounted to only one sentence and featured numerous grammatical errors, such as a misspelling in its title, "Discription [*sic*] of Worcester," which indicated that the student who had written the piece was fairly young. The student's full description

<sup>35</sup> "The Progress of Manufacturers," *National Aegis*, Apr. 11, 1863, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> A. Compo, "Discription of Worcester," *National Aegis*, Oct. 21, 1871, 1.

read, “Worcester is surrounded by Large houses Principal places city hall Common, Worcester is a grate [*siz*] Manufacturing city there are grate hotels in Worcester.”<sup>39</sup> Beneath the grammatical errors and tongue-in-cheek presentation of the piece lay an important lesson. Only a decade after Worcesterites had first embraced the term “manufacturing city,” the use of this term had become so widespread that even young children knew about the city’s manufacturing prowess and identified it as one of the city’s defining characteristic.

Within three decades of the term’s introduction, the “manufacturing city” label even became normalized as the city’s primary identity. The *Worcester Daily Spy*, the same paper that had previously borne the name *Massachusetts Spy*, printed an article in 1890 in which the newspaper challenged the notion that Worcester was merely an industrial city by highlighting the size and quality of the city’s universities. However, while setting up this argument, the paper also noted that Worcester residents were “accustomed to think of Worcester as a manufacturing city and to attribute its reputation, its prosperity and its rapid advance to the rank of third city of New England in population, to the development of its varied mechanical industries.”<sup>40</sup> Ascribing to the longstanding progress and prosperity narratives, the *Spy* revealed that, less than half a century after the very mention of the term produced anxiety and fear, most Worcesterites tended to think of the city primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of its identity as a “manufacturing city.” Thus, the identity shift that paralleled the rise of Worcester’s manufacturing industry represented a radical reshaping of the community in its own right.

To Worcesterites, the importance of their city’s rise as a manufacturing center extended beyond mere technological advances and the population increase to include social progress itself. The growth of Worcester took place, after all, in the milieu of nineteenth-century America which viewed Social Darwinist thinking as one very real explanation for development. An 1882 advertising catalog for Worcester framed its development-minded history in these terms:

Agriculture, Commerce and Industry thus are typical of three grades of civilization, the last mentioned being latest in order of appearance, but *first* in culture and refinement. It is then but the fulfillment of nature’s edict that the industrial community is peculiar to modern civilization. With the diffusion of knowledge and the advancement of science came the development of manufactures.<sup>41</sup>

In this narrative, the rise of industry represented a civilizing process characterized by increasing reason, order, and artistry rather than the morally corrupting force it had been portrayed as in earlier accounts. Further, this narrative combined a Social

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Commencement Week,” *Worcester Daily Spy*, June 6, 1890, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Commerce, Manufacturers, and Resources of the City of Worcester and Environs: A Historical, Statistical, & Descriptive Review*, ed. James P. McKinney (National Publishing Company, Aug. 1882), 18.

Darwinist understanding of industrial development with a nationalistic belief in the primacy of the United States by continuing on from its outline of its development theory of history to say, "No country more forcibly illustrates the truth of our first statement than the United States[.] Here are the finest types of the manufacturing village or city."<sup>42</sup>

According to the Worcester catalog, the same type of "republican principles" that the *Aegis* had argued would prevent moral corruption in American manufacturing cities as they emerged in the late 1830s had, in fact, enabled the United States to rise to the forefront of the industrial world and, therefore, civilization. Discussing the manufacturing cities of the United States, the catalog stated, "Nowhere are there industrial communities possessing so high an intellectual and moral tone. They are the natural outgrowth of our democratic institutions, and are the strongest testimonial to the inestimable benefits conferred upon humanity by our republican form of government."<sup>43</sup> Of course, this narrative did little to distinguish Worcester from the nation's other manufacturing cities of the period. That is until the advertisers promoting the city used their progressive view of American industrial history to explain the development of Worcester, which they claimed most fully exemplified the civilizing influences of American government and industrial development by writing:

No American city more clearly shows this to be true than the subject of this sketch. From the early settlement its growth lay in the direction of manufacturers. Thus, early in the history of Worcester, was the foundation laid for a healthful growth in the direction of a high social order. The development has kept pace with the city's advancing prosperity.<sup>44</sup>

The progress of Worcester's manufacturing industry and the city's rise to prosperity, therefore, came to be associated with and justified through a belief in progress towards a more refined, civilized, and, above all, industrialized society.

### **Worcester: The City of Diversified Industries?**

Just as the *National Aegis* was among the first publications to christen Worcester as a "manufacturing city," the *Aegis* also put forth one of the first local articulations of the belief that manufacturing diversity ensured Worcester's long-term prosperity. For example, in 1865, the *National Aegis* detailed the number of manufacturers, branches of manufacturing industries, and manufacturing firm values before concluding, "Worcester may probably challenge a comparison with any other city in the United States for its diversified industry."<sup>45</sup> But why did the *Aegis* take such great care to detail and demonstrate this diversity? The importance of diversified industries

<sup>42</sup> McKinney, 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> "Diversified Manufactures of Worcester," *National Aegis*, Nov. 4, 1865, 2.

originated out of the belief of the *Aegis*, and eventually of other Worcester publications and most Worcesterites engaged in industrial pursuits, that “diversified industry also furnishes our people with more varied opportunities to acquire wealth, to obtain independence and character than any other nation in existence.”<sup>46</sup>

According to the logic of the decades following the Civil War, the presence of diversified industries in a locale ensured material prosperity by encouraging innovation and, more importantly in a century characterized by periodic depressions, protecting against economic downturns in any one sector. Thus, the *Aegis* featured this commentary in an article entitled “Our Prosperity.”<sup>47</sup> Although the *Aegis*’ belief in the economic benefits of diversified industries was widespread in late nineteenth century America, especially in the industrial North, it aligned well with Worcester’s antebellum industrial history as a mechanics’ haven which had also emphasized innovation, independence, and manufacturing diversity.<sup>48</sup>

Historians of Worcester have noted that diversity characterized Worcester’s manufacturing industry and that the city became known throughout the late nineteenth century for the variety of its manufacturing interests.<sup>49</sup> Carolyn J. Lawes argues that the association of the city with diversified industries characterized a shift in “temperaments” that resulted in more rigid social boundaries and less affinity for humanitarianism.<sup>50</sup> Lawes writes, “Whereas antebellum Worcesterites described their city metaphorically as the ‘Heart of the Commonwealth,’ the postbellum generation embraced the less lyrical ‘City of Diversified Industries.’”<sup>51</sup> In Lawes’ interpretation, technological advancement and the development of a more modern form of capitalism drew the ethos of the local community away from the ideals associated with a republican government and society. However, a closer examination of the “diversified industries” term reveals that this assessment is, at best, only partially accurate.

For starters, the use of the phrase “City of Diversified Industries” as a proper noun referring to Worcester does not appear in nineteenth-century advertising literature or newspapers until 1890. Even then, it made only an appearance in an advertisement manual published by the Worcester Board of Trade entitled *Worcester*:

<sup>46</sup> “Our Prosperity,” *National Aegis*, Apr. 28, 1866, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> One example of the prevalence of narratives emphasizing the merits of “diversified industries” is Charles Nordhoff’s *Politics for Young Americans* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1881); for a history of Worcester’s antebellum industrial history and the reasons for its rise to prominence, see Chapter X of Charles G. Washburn, *Industrial Worcester* (Worcester: The Davis Press, 1917), especially p. 292 and pp. 299-301.

<sup>49</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 12.

<sup>50</sup> Carolyn J. Lawes, *Women and Reform in a New England Community, 1815-1860* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 181.

<sup>51</sup> Lawes, 181.

*City of Diversified Industry*.<sup>52</sup> The term did not reach widespread use as a standardized moniker for the city on the same level as the “Heart of the Commonwealth” label until the early 1920s when the Worcester Chamber of Commerce began including it in promotional literature.<sup>53</sup> Even then, the term often appeared as a secondary moniker as was the case in an early 1920s pamphlet which sought to promote Worcester’s diversified industrial based by making the dubious claim that Worcester “[was] known throughout the world as the ‘City of Diversified Industry’” but appeared several pages after the title *Worcester: Heart of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*. Surely, Worcesterites viewed the prominence of “diversified industries” in the city as an important feature of the city, and the term often appeared in promotional literature and newspapers discussing the city’s economy starting in the mid-1860s. But in local use, the term “diversified industries” represented a local characteristic of Worcester’s identity as a “manufacturing city.” Further, Worcesterites attached specific meanings to both of these terms, especially “diversified industries,” in ways that demonstrated their attempts to preserve the city’s idyllic antebellum republican character amidst the widespread social transformation wrought by industrialization.

The *Aegis*’ 1866 “Our Prosperity” article hinted at some of the noble moral attributes and beneficial personality characteristics that Worcesterites believed were fostered among people engaged in “diversified industries.” The *Aegis* featured a striking mix of material and moral benefits when it stated, “diversified industry also furnishes our people more varied opportunities to acquire wealth, to obtain independence and character than any other nation in existence.”<sup>54</sup> The economic logic of relying on “more varied opportunities to acquire wealth” and protecting against economic depressions reacted to and originated from experiences with the tenuous market of nineteenth century America. While the logic required for the Worcester press to associate diversified industry with “independence and character” is less obvious, such associations were made by many contemporary commentators, most from well beyond Central Massachusetts. Such associations were so deeply ingrained in the thinking of late nineteenth century Americans that an 1881 textbook for schools and colleges by prominent journalist and political commentator Charles Nordhoff devoted a twelve-page chapter to the subject “Of Diversity of Industries.”<sup>55</sup> In it, Nordhoff remarked upon the effect of diversified industries for fostering practical character traits at the same time that it brought about practical economic benefits:

<sup>52</sup> Worcester Board of Trade, *Worcester: City of Diversified Industry* (Worcester, MA: Worcester Board of Trade, 1890).

<sup>53</sup> See Worcester Chamber of Commerce, *Worcester: Heart of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Worcester, MA: The Davis Press, c. 1921), 1-3.

<sup>54</sup> “Our Prosperity,” *National Aegis*, Apr. 28, 1866, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Nordhoff, 89-101.

That nation or people is happiest which has the most widely diversified industries; because its members will be led inevitably to the exercise of great and varied ingenuity and enterprise, while at the same time capital, the fruit and reward of labor, will be more equally distributed among the population than in a country where but a few industries are pursued.<sup>56</sup>

Nordhoff's book reveals that late nineteenth century Americans believed that an economy based upon diversified industries, such as the local one observed by Worcester commentators, forced participants to develop the skills of innovation and hard work, which would, in turn, produce widespread economic equality and egalitarianism.

Late nineteenth century narratives about Worcester's industrial heritage were imbued with this egalitarian spirit and emphasized the material prosperity afforded to all residents by the city's diversified manufacturing industry. As has already been discussed, narratives celebrating the economic benefits of manufacturing development for all Worcester residents date to the earliest identifications of Worcester as an industrial city. Such identifications continued throughout the century and into the next.

To be fair, the narrative became mainly widespread because it was supported by economic data and because the logic behind it was sound. With regards to wages, one advertising manual drew from a history paper by a local merchant and recorded, "The average annual income of the laborer was said to be \$240 in 1847, while in 1870 it has increased to \$377. The greater the result of a given amount of labor the greater is the happiness and possibility of the workman's comfort."<sup>57</sup> Regarding the logic behind the industrial egalitarianism in many narratives about Worcester's manufacturing economy, an 1889 advertising manual about *Leading Business Men of Worcester and Vicinity* clearly explained the origins of industrial egalitarianism within Worcester's long-term identity as a mechanics' city: "[I]n the main the growth of Worcester in population, and its increase in valuation, necessarily goes back to its many manufacturing interests which demand, and do give employment to thousands of skilled mechanics, artizans [*sic*], and laborers."<sup>58</sup> Unlike most narratives about Worcester's industrial identity, this advertising manual was printed and distributed primarily outside the city, specifically in nearby Boston. This demonstrates that although narratives about Worcester's industrial egalitarianism had changed relatively little since the 1860s, such narratives had begun to spread awareness of this carefully constructed image of the city to other locales thanks to the efforts of local business elites and advertisers. These narratives essentially mirrored the economic beliefs of the nineteenth century Republican Party by emphasizing the necessity of cooperation

<sup>56</sup> Nordhoff, 89.

<sup>57</sup> F.S. Blanchard & Co., *Industries of Worcester* (Boston: Saxby, Jones, & Co., c. 1881), 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Leading Business Men of Worcester and Vicinity* (Boston: Mercantile Publishing Company, 1889), 27.

between capital and labor as well as the belief that “all classes would benefit from economic expansion.”<sup>59</sup> To be sure, the Republican commitment of Worcesterites to egalitarianism in Northern industrial society reflected very real socioeconomic gains made by Worcester's working class during the second half of the century. However, the egalitarian narrative also obscured differences in class and served the purpose of encouraging the paternalistic nature of Worcester's labor climate by easing tensions between capital and labor.

Advertisers with interest in promoting business elites and the companies these men owned were not the only ones to put forth such narratives. A decade after the *Leading Business Men* manual put forth capital's narrative of the city's industrial past and present, in 1899 the Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council of Worcester published their own description of the city's industries. In it, they emphasized class cooperation before drawing similar egalitarian conclusions to the 1889 Boston advertising manual:

Worcester furnishes truer conditions of real life, more hopeful and rounded standards of life for 'all classes and conditions of men' than almost any other community. The resident of Worcester, be he workman with hands or brain, may have his own home, made attainable by the large industries which are glad to exchange just coin for fair service, and, by low rents, with room for the garden and leave to own his own spot of ground; while the cheapness of the overflowing home market, spilling itself in surplus all over the world, relieves him from an existence of mere animal slavery to the common needs of life.<sup>60</sup>

With statements like these, the labor organizations' narrative of Worcester's history can best be described as a bizarre mix of radical and conservative understandings of the division of material wealth. On the one hand, the labor organizations' manual contained preambles to several national unions as well as texts strongly critical of capitalists and industrialists such as August McGraith's “The Object of Unions,” George McNeill's “Philosophy of the Labor Movement,” and Samuel Gompers's “What Does Labor Want?”<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, the book contained advertisements for hundreds of local businesses, including some of the largest manufacturing firms in the city, and featured narrative elements friendly to capital. In addition to including egalitarian interpretations of local society that obscured any notion of class division, the book endorsed corporate paternalism by saying:

<sup>59</sup> Foner, 19-20.

<sup>60</sup> Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council of Worcester, Massachusetts, *Illustrated History of the Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council of Worcester and Vicinity* (Syracuse, NY: Boyd Press: 1899), 41.

<sup>61</sup> Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council of Worcester, Massachusetts; sketches and preambles of national unions on pp. 129-137; McGraith text on pp. 245-249; McNeill text on pp. 251-265; Gompers text on pp. 267-287. McGraith's text appears anonymously in the Worcester labor organizations' account but is attributed in other publications such as “Why We Organize,” *The Labor World* (Duluth and Superior, MN), May 19, 1900, 1.

Thus the manufacturer and capitalist seeking a home in Worcester finds his interests and the safety and well-being of society resting upon a basis of well-conditioned labor. The absolute rectitude, which is the truest charity, and which, if practiced, would render half the so-called charities unnecessary, has noticeably been shown by Worcester corporations toward their large armies of employes [*sic*], and mutual esteem and conditions of true individual development and manliness are the outcome of such relations as are maintained between the so-called different classes in this city.<sup>62</sup>

Most tellingly, the labor organizations' public account of industrial Worcester called into question the existence of class divisions and even class differences within the city. This classless and cooperative presentation of Worcester's social life was a product of the labor organizations' own membership and ideologies. Both the Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council represented the city's skilled workers such as painters, carpenters, tailors, building-trades workers, horseshoers, and printers.<sup>63</sup> The skilled workers represented by these organizations benefitted in many ways from the Worcester's industrial growth and generally received higher wages, more autonomy, and greater social standing than unskilled industrial laborers.

Crucially, the membership of the two labor groups did not include workers in the city's largest industrial sector, the machine and metalworking industry. Efforts to organize these excluded workers failed due to the strength of the stringent anti-union stance and paternalism of some of the city's largest employers such as the Norton Company and the Washburn and Moen Wire Manufacturing Company.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the conditions enjoyed by skilled tradesmen, laborers in Worcester in the machine and metalworking industries faced increasingly demanding work conditions as result of industrial development. In 1915 more than 3,000 local machinists went on strike demanding higher wages, an eight-hour workday, and union recognition in response to the introduction of "scientific management" techniques that divided work into smaller, routinized tasks in the name of efficiency. Said one striker, "The dissatisfaction in the shops is caused by the way they drive men — driving to get a man to do twice the amount of work."<sup>65</sup> Support for industrial development among workers in Worcester differed depending on the degree to which these workers enjoyed the material benefits, and quality of life promised to all by the progress and prosperity narratives. Because the workers who gained the most economical and political power from industrial development, the city's skilled workers, also possessed the means to present their view through labor organizations, the struggles of the city's blue-collar workers gained little attention in the local press.

Late nineteenth-century Worcesterites, at least those positioned prominently enough to produce public narratives, recognized the existence of class divisions in the United States and attached stereotypical moral characteristics to the members of

<sup>62</sup> Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council, 41.

<sup>63</sup> Rosenzweig, 20.

<sup>64</sup> Bruce Cohen, "Lords of Capital and Knights of Labor: Worcester's Labor History During the Gilded Age," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 29 (2001), 97; Rosenzweig, 20-26.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Rosenzweig, 26.

certain classes. However, Worcester commentators, including some involved in the labor movement, either rejected or failed to recognize the existence of such class divisions within their own communities. In Worcester, according to these narrative producers, all economic actors were idealized industrious and ingenious men engaged in the mechanical arts. In reality, class-divisions characterized the Worcester community, and the city had both a strong group of industrialists and a large, marginalized working-class. The uplifting narrative of class cooperation and diversified industries producing widespread prosperity for Worcester hid the material hardships faced by many blue-collar residents and the efforts of local industrialists to deny them economic gains.

### **Class, Civic Pride, & the Politics of Worcester's "Manufacturing City" Identity**

Given that the label "manufacturing city" acquired a series of moral meanings in the local consciousness, it is unsurprising that the term also possessed political associations with class dimensions as early as the 1870s. One of the most telling revelations of the classed political associations attached to the "manufacturing city" label in Worcester discourses comes from an article about New York City. This article, featured in an 1892 edition of the radical republican newspaper the *Worcester Daily Spy*, quoted prominent Republican James G. Blaine, who had served as Secretary of State and as a Maine Senator, at a New York City rally in which he said, "The opponents of the republican party [*sic*] always represent New York as a commercial city, and not a manufacturing city...but all the men engaged in commercial affairs in and about New York are smaller in number than the men engaged in manufactures."<sup>66</sup> As was common in late nineteenth-century political dialogues, Blaine juxtaposed commercial interests and manufacturing interests, with a special focus on the character of the cities in which these two types of economic activity took place. Commercial centers represented the domain of economic elites who made their fortunes off of "merely exchanging—passing from the producer to the consumer—producing nothing themselves."<sup>67</sup> Such speculation led to the accumulation of wealth by a limited number of financial elites stood in stark contrast to the Republicans' desire toward increasingly equal distribution of wealth while the financial elites themselves belonged to the wealthy class distrusted by nineteenth century Republicans.<sup>68</sup> Republicans portrayed themselves as the champions of laborers and "the common man" employed in the manufacturing industries in cities such as Worcester while describing Democrats as supporting corporations and the wealthy.

<sup>66</sup> Blaine quoted in "Blaine Speaks," *Worcester Daily Spy*, Oct. 15, 1892, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Charles Carey, *The Harmony of Interests: Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Commercial* (Philadelphia: J. S. Skinner, 1851), 145.

<sup>68</sup> See Foner, 18-23.

A vital issue in the national political debates between Republicans and Democrats about manufacturing cities was the protection of American manufacturing interests through tariffs on imported goods. Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States Congress considered implementing a series of tariffs on foreign imports. In general, Republicans supported for the import duty, while Democrats opposed them. Republican support for the tariff originated from the belief that tax protected American manufactured goods from competition in domestic markets. This allowed for competition between American companies, leading to lower prices on products for American consumers and greater returns on investment for American entrepreneurs, which in turn led to steady employment with high wages for laborers.

Class-based images of manufacturing and commercial cities featured prominently in the platforms of both the parties, especially the rhetoric of Republicans from manufacturing regions like New England. Such was the case when Republican Massachusetts congressman William A. Russell took the floor in an 1882 tariff debate. As quoted in the *Boston Herald*, Russell announced his support for the tariff because of its benefits to American laborers by saying:

There is another very important consideration in estimating THE VALUE OF PROTECTION, as it affects compensation for labor here: that is, the steady employment furnished our workmen. Our wages are not only more per diem than in other countries, but the employment constant, insuring a larger yearly income. Our works are not so easily affected by the ebb and flow of surplus products as with other countries; the laws of demand and supply control the increase of manufactures here, and we seldom have long seasons of depression and consequent suffering among our people. We have in our manufacturing cities good illustrations of the advantages of protection and diversified interests, both as they relate to the cities themselves and to their importance to other sections of the country. We have Manchester, Fall River and a score of other large manufacturing cities in New England dependent upon the agricultural regions for their food. All of these have sprung up since the Clay tariff of 1824, and not one of them would have been in existence today without it.<sup>69</sup>

If manufacturing cities demonstrated the importance of protective tariffs for supporting American workers, commercial cities showed the shortcomings of the existing tariff in establishing a genuinely egalitarian industrialism. Russell alluded to Democratic attacks against the tariff based upon the same logic of egalitarianism saying, "It is said that our system of protection makes THE RICH RICHER AND THE POOR POORER, and a few men who live in our great commercial cities are made the scapegoats. Their great fortunes furnish the text for all sorts of hostile legislation."<sup>70</sup> However, Russell argued that the Democratic Party misplaced its attacks by targeting manufacturing interests in commercial centers.

Like most Republicans, Russell claimed that commercialists were the true enemy

<sup>69</sup> "The Tariff: The House Further Considers the Question of Revision," *Boston Herald*, Mar. 30, 1882, 1; emphasis added by *Boston Herald*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*.

of egalitarianism while flipping the Democratic critiques by saying, "The great fortunes, however, have been made in this country in land, railroad and commercial speculations, and not in manufacturing. Very few manufacturers have fortunes independent of their brick and mortar investments."<sup>71</sup> Operating within the Republican ideology that viewed the manufacturing economy as one of the small independent manufacturing entrepreneurs, Russell's claim resembled Worcesterites understanding of their own industrial identity as a small shop town. The same could be said for Russell's egalitarian interpretation of the effects of the tariff which highlighted the need for cooperation between all socioeconomic classes: "The protective features of our tariff were instituted and have been maintained in the interests of no one class of our citizens, but for all."<sup>72</sup>

Local politicians and producers of narratives about Worcester's identity as a "manufacturing city" were well aware of the politics surrounding the term. The local identification of Worcester as a manufacturing city provided a rhetorical advantage to Republicans and forced Democratic candidates to address concerns of local laborers on the campaign trail. Democratic candidate John E. Russell felt such a need to address working-class concerns about the tariff that he devoted almost the entirety of the speech declaring his candidacy in the 1886 congressional election for Worcester's representative in the House to the topic. Russell flatly stated, "Now the tariff is to protect the laborer. That is nothing but a pretense—a dishonest pretense. It is well known that wages are lower in protected industries than in industries that protection cannot reach."<sup>73</sup> The *Worcester Daily Spy* was not convinced. The very day after printing the full transcript of Russell's speech, the *Spy* presented an editorial on Russell's candidacy with regards to the tariff debate and the effects that repealing the tariff would have on Worcester:

Congress could kill or cripple [Worcester's] industries by enacting a tariff for revenue only, could turn Worcester into a decaying and dwindling, instead of thriving and growing city, and stop the factories in all those busy towns. Mr. Russell probably does not think this would be the effect of his doctrines if put in practice. But, though there may be room for difference of opinion on the point, it is a serious thing to tamper with the industries of a great country.<sup>74</sup>

Given the importance of the manufacturing industry, it seems somewhat surprising that the local residents sided with Russell and the Democrats over the *Spy* and the Republicans. However, as historian Robert Kolesar has demonstrated, Worcester politics in the late nineteenth century were dominated by development-minded politicians of both parties who capitalized upon the city's identity as a manufacturing

<sup>71</sup> "The Tariff: The House Further Considers the Question of Revision," *Boston Herald*, Mar. 30, 1882, 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> "John E. Russell's Speech in Spencer. Opening of His Congressional Campaign," *Worcester Daily Spy*, Oct. 18, 1886.

<sup>74</sup> "Would It Be Wise?" *Worcester Daily Spy*, Oct. 19, 1886, 2.

city and enacted policies favorable to local industrial growth.<sup>75</sup>

Late-nineteenth-century political narratives about Worcester as a manufacturing city emerged very much in relation to Republican understandings of commercial cities. An 1882 advertising catalog demonstrated that Worcesterites possessed the same opinion of speculation as immoral while making a similar comparison between manufacturing and commercial cities by stating that Worcester “has been always free from the feverish, demoralizing influences of the speculation incident to a commercial city.”<sup>76</sup> Instead, Worcester served the nation by enhancing and ensuring the American quality of life through the production of useful goods. The *Worcester Daily Spy* presented this narrative to its readership in 1884 when it wrote that Worcester was “essentially a manufacturing city, its wealth, its population, its ambition, its lines of thought leading almost wholly in the manufacture of something, and, almost entirely, of something useful.”<sup>77</sup> According to both commercial advertisers and unionists, these useful goods provided consumers with an increased ability to access “some of the most essential comforts of life.”<sup>78</sup> In this narrative, both the city and its workers gained a potential source of pride through the very nature of their manufacturing labor and its productive contributions to the betterment of American society.

By emphasizing the importance of manufacturing cities and Worcester’s prominence among them, local narrative producers crafted an industrial identity for the city with pride at its heart. Proud presentations of Worcester’s industrial nature emerged in the rhetoric of advertisers and local politicians throughout the late nineteenth century and became fully formed in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Worcester Board of Trade put forth one such testimony about the character of the city in a 1906 account which began, “Worcester is essentially a manufacturing city, and, as such, one of the most important of American cities.”<sup>79</sup> According to the Board of Trade, Worcester’s identity as a manufacturing city gave it superiority over all cities that did not produce goods upon which the American way of life depended. But Worcester possessed an even greater importance in this narrative because, “The industrial life of the city has beat with strong, unfaltering pulsation through the years that have passed. The character and intelligence of the people have made Worcester what she is: Foremost among manufacturing cities; first among American inland cities.”<sup>80</sup> Once viewed as something to fear, the

<sup>75</sup> Robert J. Kolesar, “The Politics of Development: Worcester, Massachusetts, in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Urban History* 16, no. 1 (1989), 6-7.

<sup>76</sup> McKinney, 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Railway Age*, “Worcester (Mass.) Notes,” *Worcester Daily Spy*, June 4, 1884, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council, 39; for similar narratives published for the purposes of advertising Worcester businesses see *Commerce, Manufacturers, and Resources of the City of Worcester*, 18-19, and F.S. Blanchard & Co., *Industries of Worcester*, 3-7.

<sup>79</sup> Worcester Board of Trade, *Worcester, Her Worth, Her Works*, 45.

<sup>80</sup> Worcester Board of Trade, *Worcester, Her Worth, Her Works*, 45.

manufacturing-centric economy now provided Worcester with a level of importance that made its manufacturing city identity not only palatable but also prideful. It was for these reasons that the *Boston Herald* stated in a 1909 article that “what Worcester people unanimously pride themselves upon is the industrial activity of the place.”<sup>81</sup>

Worcesterites specifically noted their city's position as “first among American inland cities,” meaning the largest industrial city not on a major waterway such as a river or ocean. This feat represented a special point of pride in narratives about the character of the city because it “proved that mechanical skill, enterprise, and industry, can build up a large city, even though it does not possess the advantage of code water and commerce.”<sup>82</sup> That is to say, Worcester's rise to prominence demonstrated that the city's residents possessed supreme industrial talents which enabled the city to overcome its relative geographical disadvantage, which is why one advertising catalog stated, “Worcester has a history of which its people may well be proud.”<sup>83</sup> Granted, advertisers and the Board of Trade had a vested interest in crafting narratives that positively depicted the importance of Worcester as a city and the industrial abilities of its workforce to sell locally produced products and attract additional manufacturing businesses to the area. However, that fact does not detract from the power of the Board's narrative to provide a potential source of pride for local residents and workers whose work this narrative deemed essential and superior to that of others.

This compelling narrative appealed to at least some of Worcester's labor organizations. Several years before the appearance of the Board of Trade's report in which it attempted to craft an industrial identity for Worcester that instilled pride in local readers, the Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council of Worcester, two of the city's largest labor organizations, published a very similar narrative.

It seems almost incredible that Worcester...should be home of as large a number of manufacturing enterprises, in proportion to population, as any city in the United States; yet this is so, and when one considers the interests represented here he certainly has reason to feel proud of the place as one of the great industrial, progressives cities of New England.<sup>84</sup>

In Worcester, the standard American workingman's pride in the production of goods developed a local variant in public narratives which emphasized the unique contributions of the city.

In the process, the narrative presented by the skilled laborers in the Central Labor Union and Building Trades Council once again became closely aligned with

<sup>81</sup> “Worcester City of Booming Trade,” *Boston Herald*, June 20, 1909, 16.

<sup>82</sup> *Leading Business Men of Worcester and Vicinity*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Central Labor Union and the Building Trades Council, 43-45.

descriptions put forth by capital interests such as the Board of Trade, a group endorsed by the labor organizations' account of Worcester history as possessing "a career of great usefulness."<sup>85</sup> This left Worcester's blue-collar industrial workers with little agency over narratives about their own identity and served to further ensure labor passivity in a city where the labor movement was already weak. Regardless of whether or not actual blue-collar workers took pride in the industrial enterprises of the city, the public record indicated that they did. Many working-class Worcesterites inevitably developed their conceptions of identity based upon their class, labor, place of residence, and, as Roy Rosenzweig suggests, ethnic heritage.<sup>86</sup> However, there is no way in which blue-collar workers could have formulated individual identities without being influenced by public narratives about Worcester as a manufacturing city or without constructing their own personal identities in relation to the public narrative.

### **Conclusion: Structural Weaknesses Appear in Worcester Despite Continued Prosperity**

Amidst a regional industrial decline in the 1920s and 1930s, commentators celebrated the continued prosperity of Worcester. While discussing Worcester in his definitive overview of the state's manufacturers published in 1930, Orra Stone remarked, "it is interesting to note that between 1913 and 1927, the number of local manufacturing establishments rose from 448, in the former year to 515, in the latter while invested capital increased from \$75,474,918, in 1913 to \$174,115,467 in 1927."<sup>87</sup> But the successes of Worcester went even further, with Stone continuing: "Most significant of all, however, is the increase in the value of products in this fifteen year period. In 1913, the commodities fabricated in the 448 establishments were valued at \$89,707,793, while in 1927, the value of locally manufactured goods was \$191,865,312."<sup>88</sup> These statistics were so "interesting to note" for Stone, and for other New Englanders of the period, because they demonstrated Worcester's ability to resist the manufacturing decline that befell the region, and most especially Massachusetts, in the two decades after World War I. From 1923 to 1939, the state's number of manufacturing jobs declined 31 percent, from 6670,000 to 461,000.<sup>89</sup> The economic climate in which Stone wrote and published his survey was so desperate that one Massachusetts textile worker reflected upon it by saying, "Nineteen twenty-

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>86</sup> Rosenzweig explores the ethnic nature of working-class social life in Worcester throughout his book but a concise overview of this trend can be found on pp 27-32.

<sup>87</sup> Orra L. Stone, *History of Massachusetts Industries: Their Inception, Growth, and Success* (Boston, MA: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1930), 1650.

<sup>88</sup> Stone, 1650.

<sup>89</sup> David Koistinen, *Confronting Decline: The Political Economy of Deindustrialization in Twentieth-Century New England* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 15.

eight, 1929, 1930, very bad. No jobs, no work, nowhere. No help from the city; you just suffer, that's all."<sup>90</sup> Manufacturing employment declined slightly in Worcester as well, from 31,801 in 1913 to 30,162 in 1923, but industrial workers garnered increased prosperity during the period because "wages paid in 1913, amounting to \$19,887,759, rose to \$41,082,936, in 1927."<sup>91</sup>

In a turn of fate that would have made nineteenth century Worcesterites proud, the city owed its continued economic prosperity to the strength of its diversified industries. Although Stone reported, "Worcester has long been recognized as typical of industrial Massachusetts, due in a great degree to the fact that from the beginning it has possessed diversified industries,"<sup>92</sup> the truth is that Worcester's diversified industries both stood outside the regional norm and, at least temporarily, saved the city from the same fate as the rest of the state. Stone highlighted the fact that in Worcester "more than 3,000 different manufactured products [were] daily turned out by more than 500 establishments located in the city."<sup>93</sup> In contrast, as historian David Koistinen notes, the industrial decline in New England most affected the cities and towns that had to that point relied almost exclusively on the cotton textile industry.<sup>94</sup>

That said, reading Stone's piece in hindsight reveals that Worcester's industries were poorly positioned to continue prospering indefinitely. Stone posited, "Worcester's industries can best be described as 'Manufacturers to Industrial America'" because "a considerable percentage of its manufactured products never reaches the so-called ultimate consumer in the form in which they are produced, because of the fact that they are utilized as essential equipment in a wide variety of industrial plants."<sup>95</sup> This characteristic of Worcester's industrial economy would eventually prove problematic for two reasons. First, it made the demand for the products of Worcester's manufacturers dependent upon industrial conditions in other locales. That is to say that industrial Worcester would prosper only as long as Industrial America did. Second, it meant that the city of Worcester would only benefit indirectly from the economic stimulus of the New Deal in the late 1930s and the years following World War II because this stimulus worked by encouraging widespread consumption by the American populous, the mass of people Stone referred to as "the so-called ultimate consumer."<sup>96</sup> For most of its first century as an industrial city, Worcester enjoyed sustained growth by adhering to the logic that diversified manufacturing industries generated economic prosperity. However, the

<sup>90</sup> John Falante, oral history interview conducted by Mary H. Blewett in *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 183.

<sup>91</sup> Stone, 1650.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 1651

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 1651

<sup>94</sup> Koistinen, 15-18.

<sup>95</sup> Stone, 1652; Stone, 1651-1652.

<sup>96</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 54.

diversified industrial base of Worcester could do little to protect the city from the effects of the Great Depression and the United States' transition to a post-industrial economy in the latter half of the twentieth century.