

ESSAY

“Geographies of Peoples”: Scientific Racism and Labor Internationalism in Gilded Age American Socialism

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Abstract

This article investigates ideas of race in Gilded Age socialism by analyzing the intellectual production of the leaders of the Socialist Party of America (SLP) from 1876 to 1882. Existing scholarship on socialism and race during the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era rarely addresses socialist conceptions of race prior to 1901 and fails to recognize the centrality of scientific racialism and Darwinism in influencing socialist thought. By positioning American socialism within a transatlantic scenario and reconstructing how the immigrant origins of Gilded Age socialists influenced their perceptions of race, this article argues that scientific racialism and Darwinism competed with color-blind internationalism in shaping the racial policies of the SLP during the Gilded Age. Moreover, a transatlantic investigation of American socialist ideas of race presents a reinterpretation of the early phases of the history of the SLP and addresses its historical legacies. While advocates of scientific racialism and Darwinism determined the racial policies of the SLP in the 1880s, color-blind internationalists abandoned the party and extended their influence beyond organized socialism, especially in the Knights of Labor.

I believe in race ... To mingle the blood of four hundreds millions of Chinese (not to speak of other Mongolian nations), with that of forty millions of whites and four millions of Africans, would deteriorate the whole mass, and yield a human product as bad, or worse, than the mongrel mixture of red, white and black races of Mexico and South America.¹

The author of these words, published in 1879, was not a white supremacist affiliated with an extremist anti-Chinese group, nor a devoted supporter of the most exclusionary forms of scientific racialism such as those of William Graham Sumner.² Instead, this passage featured in a heated exchange of letters within the pages of *The Socialist*, the official organ of the Socialist Labor Party of America (SLP). “Leo,” the author of the article, invoked the authority of “the most prominent Socialists and enlightened thinkers of the day” to bolster his point.³ The interbreeding of different racial types, he argued, was a real danger for the whole humankind, and therefore Chinese immigration in the United States must be stopped. While he admitted that his exclusionary plans did

not “quite coincide with the theory of the universal brotherhood of all mankind, which is the ultimate aim of Socialism,” he also contended that “at present” he was “too deeply interested in dragging from starvation and degradation our own dear wives and children ... to pay too much attention to the inhumanely-persecuted Mongolian just now.”⁴

Socialist papers of the late 1870s and early 1880s are littered with opinions like Leo’s. However, existing scholarship on ideas of race within the American socialist movement has not so far fully acknowledged the relevance of scientific racialism and Darwinism to socialists of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.⁵ Philip S. Foner and Sally M. Miller have traced the presence of a right-wing and openly racist faction within Eugene V. Debs’s Socialist Party of America (SPA), led by the likes of Victor Berger and Ernest Untermann. However, neither of them has offered a systematic analysis of the impact of scientific racialism and Darwinism in shaping the opinions of Gilded Age and Progressive Era socialists.⁶ Among scholars of radicalism, Gilded Age socialist ideas of race have rarely received any treatment at all, while the SPA has been analyzed through the reductive prism of the opinions of Eugene V. Debs, its most influential leader. As aptly noted by William P. Jones, the infamous quote from Debs’s 1903 article on the “Negro Question,” “we have nothing special to offer to the Negro,” has been taken as a paradigmatic example of the strengths and the limits of socialists of the period, at the same time open to progressive universalist measures of improvement, yet unable to understand the specific conditions of socioeconomic exploitation that racial minorities were subjected to in the country.⁷

Current scholarship is driven by an excessive focus on Progressive Era socialism. Scholars have widely discussed the period that begins with the foundation of the Socialist Party of America in 1901 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. This focus has been justified because during this long decade the influence of socialism in the United States peaked.⁸ However, expanding the scope of the analysis back into the late nineteenth century allows a more nuanced and complicated description of the ways in which ideas of race and socialism developed in the country. This description needs to take into account that during the Gilded Age, the bulk of American socialists were first- and second- generation immigrants and therefore understood and used scientific racialist, Darwinist, and internationalist ideas in ways that differed from those of their native-born Progressive Era comrades. By placing American socialism within a transatlantic and transnational intellectual context, and by recontextualizing socialist ideas of race within the contemporary debates on evolution, civilization, and modernity that took place in both the United States and Europe, it is possible to present a more accurate description of the strengths and limitations of American socialist attitudes toward race. This article addresses the task by investigating the ideas of a group of leaders of the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), the leading socialist organization of the Gilded Age.

The Gilded Age was a period in which social relations were shaped by profound tensions along lines of race, class, and ethnicity. The failure of Reconstruction and its devastating impact on race relations in the South; the constant pressure of immigration from Europe, Asia, and Central America; and the recurring economic crises caused by the uncontrolled growth of the American industry, put an enormous pressure on the American working class, generating one of the most conflict-ridden periods of U.S. history. Socialists were at the very center of this storm. The result of a fusion of several socialist associations scattered around the country, the SLP was founded in Philadelphia in 1876, just three months before the controversial election that placed Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House and led to the end of Reconstruction. With

a strong presence in every American industrial center, from New York to Chicago, Cincinnati to St. Louis, and various outposts in the South and on the West Coast, the SLP was the first national labor movement organized according to socialist principles ever founded on the American soil.⁹

Scholars have widely dismissed the relevance of the SLP to matters of race, pointing to its political irrelevance and its ethnic composition. Theodore Draper, for example, has contended that the SLP “was never more than an American head on an immigrant body.” Despite a small presence of American activists at the top of the organization, contends the historian of American socialism, the SLP never managed to extend its influence beyond a few ethnic enclaves.¹⁰ Gary Marks and Seymour Lipset argue that “for many years the SLP ‘was a small Turnverein whose members hassled over old world politics’” and in which “early meetings were conducted in German.”¹¹ The immigrant composition of the SLP is an undeniable fact. In its first years of existence, 80 to 90 percent of the SLP’s membership had German as a first language.¹² However, these scholars seem to forget how important and influential immigrant communities were at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in industrial cities, and how much they shaped the history of the country during the twentieth century. In 1880, in ten of the fifteen biggest American cities, including New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis, between 30 and 40 percent of the population was foreign born, with the German-speaking community regularly featuring as one of the most numerous groups.¹³ According to the 1880 U.S. Census, in New York City alone there were 163,482 people born in the German Empire (some 13 percent of the total population of the city), 55,339 in Brooklyn (10 percent), 75,205 in Chicago (15 percent), and 54,901 in St. Louis (16 percent).¹⁴ These enormous communities were progressively integrated in the American society. Their ideas profoundly shaped the shared political culture of the country, especially in radical, socialist, and anarchist communities.¹⁵

By taking ethnicity as a defining feature of Gilded Age American socialism, rather than as a mere explanation of the historical weakness of the movement, this article investigates how ideas of race and socialism developed in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the period in which the early SLP was at the peak of its influence.¹⁶ German American socialists carried with them deeply ingrained worldviews, grown in Europe, which were constantly discussed and renegotiated in the American socialist press. Transatlantic connections between socialists made the opinions of SLP members relevant not only for the German American community, but also for the German-speaking European one. German American dailies and weeklies were read in Europe, and German American authors read the European press.¹⁷ Innovative and groundbreaking points of view flourished in this transatlantic space, populated by individuals whose backgrounds, identities, and ideas cannot be described through the monodimensional concept of “national.”¹⁸

The first two sections of this article will explore the connections between scientific racialism and Darwinism in the German American socialist press and German racial thought. Discussing the ideas of Adolph Douai, a German American leader of the SLP and coeditor of the three official papers of the party (the *Labor Standard*, the *Chicagoer Vorbote*, and the *Arbeiter Stimme*), the first section will demonstrate how, in the work of early immigrants who arrived in the United States after the failure of the 1848 European revolts, we can observe the influence of pre-Darwinian and holistic approaches, which spanned from Lamarckism to the Romantic conceptions of Alexander Von Humboldt.¹⁹ These trends, widely spread in the German-language intellectual circles of the first half of the nineteenth century, were replaced by biological

theories of race after the 1850s—and this change is reflected in socialist sources. As the second section illustrates, for German immigrants landing in the United States in the 1870s like Paul Grottkau and August Otto-Walster, the influence of Darwinism was almost totalizing. These socialists took for granted that the theories put forward by Darwin regulated social interactions, and therefore their objective was to figure out how to negotiate them and their own socialist tenets.²⁰

Not all members of the SLP used scientific racialism and Darwinism to discuss race. The third section of the article will examine the ideas of a group of labor internationalists, led by Joseph McDonnell and the German American Friedrich A. Sorge, who thought that interethnic and interracial conflicts were not matters that biology could explain. On the contrary, they contended, these conflicts needed to be interpreted as consequences of the capitalist dynamics of economic production. The last section of this article will discuss how intellectual clashes on race intertwined with divisions on political strategy within the SLP. The foundation of the party in 1876 represented a compromise between supporters of trade unionism and supporters of political activism through the ballot box. However, political quarrels rapidly re-emerged and forced many trade unionists to abandon the organization. This had a serious impact on the future of the socialist association because it significantly reduced the number of members in favor of organizing workers across racial lines. It would be wrong to conclude that after 1879 the SLP was led by a leadership totally insensitive toward interracial cooperation. However, in the 1880s the most advanced and progressive episodes of interracial cooperation took place outside the socialist movement, for example, in the Knights of Labor, and not within it. This happened also as a result of the SLP's decision to prioritize political action against trade unionism, an approach that went against the promotion of cooperation across the racial line.

The articles of leaders like Douai, Grottkau, Otto-Walster, and McDonnell shed light on a transatlantic debate on race that took place among American socialists during the Gilded Age. In this debate, scientific theories of race were absolutely central and competed with labor internationalism in shaping socialist approaches toward racial minorities in the country. The analysis of this debate generates a more detailed understanding of American socialism and outlines arguably the first occasion in which a socialist movement throughout the world openly confronted the issue of race.

Scientific Racialism and Darwinism in the German American Socialist Movement: The Case of Adolph Douai

At the foundation of the SLP in Philadelphia 1876, divisions over political strategy were reflected in the ways in which the party press was organized. Supporters of trade unionism came together around the English-language *Labor Standard* and the German-language *Chicagoer Vorbote*, whereas supporters of political action took control of the German-language *Arbeiter Stimme*, based in New York.²¹ One of the few individuals who could go beyond factional disputes and speak to the whole party was the German American leader Adolph Douai. A native of Thuringia, Douai had arrived in the United States in the early 1850s, where he spent some years in Texas working as an editor of the abolitionist paper *San Antonio Zeitung*, before being forced by the reactions to his political activism to relocate North.²² In the late 1870s, Douai was one of the most popular leaders of the American socialist movement, and for this reason he was appointed assistant editor for all the three SLP newspapers during the founding Congress in Philadelphia.²³ From this influential position, the German

American leader had the chance to address the entire SLP on a topic that was of primary interest to him: scientific theories of race.

Douai had a profound fascination with scientific racialism, dating back to his time in Europe. He called his area of enquiry the “geography of peoples.” Douai published several articles under this title throughout his career, the first one already in the *San Antonio Zeitung* in 1854. He also wrote a book on the topic, called *Land und Leute in der Union* (“Land and People in the Union”), which was published by a German press in 1864 and discussed the history of the United States through the prism of Douai’s theories of human development.²⁴ Douai’s articles, discussed in this section, reached a vast readership among German American socialists. They open a privileged window on the ways in which this first generation of German American socialists conceptualized the relationship between socialism and race.

In his 1884 autobiography, Douai claimed that in 1848 he had already begun describing himself as “a professor of the theory of evolution in natural science.”²⁵ He went even further, writing that in the late 1850s he would have included himself among the Germans that were “Darwinians before Darwin.” He claimed that without any training in natural history, he could trace the humankind’s origin from animals and reconstruct the link between geographical conditions and evolution. And he could do this well before the English scientist published *On the Origin of Species*.²⁶ These few remarks demonstrate his full endorsement of Darwin’s research. They also provoke questions regarding the way in which the socialist Douai interpreted and understood Darwin’s revolutionary theory. In 1878, Douai opened an article in the *Chicagoer Vorbote* by arguing that “the great theory of Darwin brilliantly discovered that in nature there were two ways in which the great wealth of different types of creatures comes off, descent and adaptation.” But in his next sentence he developed an opinion with which Darwin would not readily agree with:

Living creatures will remain similar to parents as long as no other effect of nature changes that similarity (...). External events in nature include food, housing, the air we breathe, the shape and colors of the objects around us, and all the sensory stimuli they produce, the surface morphology of the soil, the climate of the locality, the enemies and the friends among the other living creatures; we prefer to group all these effects under the common name of “soil”, or soil and climate.²⁷

At first sight, Douai embraced Darwin’s point of view. Yet his explanation of human evolution proved that pre-Darwinian elements continued characterizing his approach to race. According to Douai, every single change in geography caused a parallel change in the physical structure of human beings. If people remained in the same place, no modification intervened. But once, for whatever reasons, they moved, their bodies progressively adapted to the new environment. According to Douai, this process created a vast variety of different living beings, out of which, through a Darwinian process of selection, only the best survived.

Douai’s fraught rearticulation of Darwin’s point of view attests to the complicated process whereby the scientific debate on evolution unfolded between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Discussions on evolutionism, while conducted in intellectual circles far from the public eye, had a profound impact on social, economic, and political interactions in society at large. The morality of slavery, the approaches toward foreign nations in international relations, the adoption of policies for social support: in all these areas, intellectuals considered the then-modern theories of human evolution.²⁸

In view of the predominance of these ideas, any analysis of socialist opinions during the Gilded Age must consider this intellectual scenario. The details of Douai's own scientific theories provide information on how he conceptualized the possibility of interracial and interethnic cooperation on the workplace between American workers. For this reason, it is necessary to trace back the development of Douai's point of view by examining the development of scientific theories of race in Europe between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In his writings, Douai referred extensively to environmental circumstances, and his fixation with geography was far from original. In the eighteenth century, as geographical discoveries prompted stories of exotic populations from different areas of the world, intellectuals started to theorize reasons for human physical and cultural differences.²⁹ For example, in his magnum opus *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), the French intellectual Charles Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu elaborated a model according to which environmental circumstances decided not only human attitudes but also political and social features of the different human groups. For Montesquieu, climate and geography explained why despotism and slavery were common in Asia, whereas monarchies, republics, and more liberal regimes proliferated in temperate areas like Europe.³⁰

In the nineteenth century, naturalists and geographers started to ground their theses in firsthand data acquired from explorations and fieldwork. Geological observation led to the widely held belief that the earth was constantly evolving. Many extended this idea to the organic world, suggesting that both animals and humans were the product of centuries-long processes of evolution. But then the question became: How was evolution possible? In what way had living beings changed over time?³¹ One of the most influential replies came from Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829), who wrote a more sophisticated and scientifically grounded version of the geographic determinism theorized by Montesquieu. Lamarckism presented a theory that suggested that living beings developed physical features according to their surrounding geographical environment. Lamarckism postulated that humans and animals could pass characteristics developed during their lifetime to their offspring. For example, the necks of giraffes had stretched because of the animals' repeated attempts to reach the furthest leaves on trees.³² In *The Origins of the Species*, Darwin corrected the ideas of the geographic determinists in a significant way, adding the fundamental point: *random selection*. To keep the example of the giraffe, whereas Lamarck had argued that the animals managed to stretch their necks, Darwin maintained that out of a group of animals whose different features had developed in a completely random way, only giraffes had survived because of their special ability to reach sources of food inaccessible to animals with shorter necks.³³

These details give hints on Douai's shortcomings. Douai's point of view remained grounded in geographical determinism rather than the developed version of transmutation put forward by Darwin. His belief that living beings evolved according to the geographical surroundings resembled an expanded version of Lamarckism. Douai was incredibly imaginative in describing the effects of geographic circumstances on human bodies. To give one example, he argued that people living in the Tropics had dark skin because the heat prevented their lungs from breathing out all the carbon dioxide in the blood. As a result, some dioxide ended up under the skin and darkened its color. Douai provided a further detail to prove his theory, writing that "the negro children are fairly white because they only begin to breathe at birth, and only later progressively darken."³⁴ This and many other descriptions in Douai's writings indicate that he understood human evolution as a constant and regular process, which could modify

human features in the span of a few generations, whereas Darwin maintained that evolution happened through millennia.

Douai's understanding of Darwin's theory was reflected in the ways in which the two conceived of racial equality. Despite his monogenist and evolutionist theory, Darwin was not against the idea of a hierarchy of human groups. As historian Robert J. Richards stresses, Darwin "aligned the human groups on a developmental path, from 'savage' races to the 'civilized.'" In actual fact, Darwin refrained from using the term "race," which he considered indistinguishable from that of species.³⁵ But the most important points to stress here are, firstly, that Darwin circumscribed the level of development to *non*-biological fields: from a biological point of view, men and women were all equal. Differences occurred in the realm of political, cultural, social advancement, but not in the realm of biology. Secondly, Darwin believed that the differences in levels of human social development were modifiable through time. Darwin's classification was not cast in stone, but was flexible and modifiable.

Douai was a supporter of monogenism, but the way in which he conceived of and explained human differences was different from Darwin's. Douai stressed that human beings had far more similarities than differences, and for him this was enough to conclude that humans were all part of the same species, as demonstrated by Charles Darwin.³⁶ However, Douai also believed that "species" and "races" were two different concepts, and he took on the task of explaining human diversity with special enthusiasm. His analytical methodology was revealing of further influences that shaped Douai's theory of race. Douai combined historical information with considerations of nutrition, the availability of food and domesticated animals, geographic circumstances, technological developments, and linguistics. Therefore, even though he apparently based his theory of transmutation only on geography, in reality he formulated an analysis that was holistic in its methodology and scope. Douai placed African Americans, "negritos," Malaysians, native Americans, and "half-breeds of the white, yellow and white race" on the lowest scale of human development, whereas "in the temperate climates," he maintained, "we find both the largest variety of bodily and mental development and the only progressed culture."³⁷ As these few remarks show, Douai connected biological human development to the technological, cultural, and social status of sophistication of the respective cultures and societies: tribes living in the Tropics, Malaysia, or Africa were the least developed, whereas Europe and the United States were at the top of the scale. In Douai's analysis the biological and the cultural continuously intertwined. As a result, the "white race" not only had a higher level of technological development, but it was also "mentally and physically superior."³⁸

In constructing his theories, Douai drew on the work of various German scholars that he had encountered during his formative academic years. Alexander von Humboldt, the founder of historic and human geography, was surely among them. Humboldt grew up reading Immanuel Kant's books and discussing his theories with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, and his brother Wilhelm von Humboldt, later a leading linguist and founder of the Humboldt University in Berlin.³⁹ His travels in South America between 1799 and 1804, and his published accounts of them, inaugurated a new method of study encompassing the interaction of mankind and the geographical environment.⁴⁰ It was in Humboldt's methods that Douai found a key inspiration for his theories. Historian Laura Dassow Walls argues that Humboldt's scientific method was based on four mandates: explore, collect, measure, and connect. These phases implied scientific procedures but also aesthetical and sensorial practices, in which the scientist was expected to personally "experience" the

place. Crucially, Humboldt believed that the set of disparate data the scientist gathered during his explorations could be brought together into a holistic view of nature. His main work, *Cosmos*, was a five-volume attempt to synthesize his grand theory of nature into a unified system, one which drew on everything, from emotional responses to natural landscapes to the explanation of theories connected to geographical phenomena. *Cosmos* was a powerful and influential expression of early nineteenth-century Romanticism. In its commingling of different disciplines, Humboldt's work became enormously influential not only for scientists like Charles Darwin, but also for American artists like the Transcendentalists and the painters of the American Hudson River school.⁴¹

Humboldt died in 1859. In that period, Douai was a schoolteacher in Boston. His love for Humboldt was so renowned that the local German association asked him to organize an event of commemoration for the deceased Prussian naturalist.⁴² On reading Douai's work, it is not difficult to see how much Douai had relied on Humboldt's theories: the German American socialist was imitating the same all-embracing analytical style of his intellectual role model, using a broad-ranging multidisciplinary approach that tried to reconstruct the development of the different human races by putting together different elements in a logically consistent structure. Unfortunately, Douai was not an explorer, nor could he collect primary material or measure the geographical features of the places he analyzed. What is more, he lacked Humboldt's scientific rigor and refined education. His results, therefore, were much more modest. While Humboldt produced works that revolutionized contemporary conceptions of the relationship between the humans and their environment, Douai created an incoherent patchwork which attested to the erudition of its author but was hardly a successful discussion of the complex issues at stake.

The differences between the two can be explored by investigating Humboldt's opinions on the idea of race. In *Cosmos*, Humboldt argued that mankind was distributed in varieties, "designed by the somewhat indefinite term *races*." However, the differences between human groups were so many that to give a sharp, clear, *scientific* definition of the idea of race was essentially impossible. On the idea of creating a table of human races, Humboldt was crystal clear:

While we maintain the unity of the human species, we at the same time repel the depressing assumption of superior and inferior races of men. There are nations more susceptible of cultivation, more highly civilized, more ennobled by mental cultivation than other, but none in themselves nobler than others.⁴³

As this passage clearly demonstrates, Humboldt believed that while the humankind was divided into different groups with different attitudes, divisions based on inherent racial features simply did not exist. All men and women were "in like degree designed for freedom; a freedom which, in the ruder conditions of society, belongs only to the individual, but which, in social states enjoying political institutions, appertains as a right to the whole body of the community."⁴⁴

In his articles, Douai rearticulated Humboldt's egalitarian position in light of his different scientific approach. Douai adopted a holistic Humboldtian approach, but he believed that whereas the Prussian naturalist had limited himself to the analysis of the natural world, modern methodologies such as Darwinism now enabled modern scientists to expand Humboldt's enquiry to include human beings. The problem was that Douai got Darwin's theory wrong. As we have seen, the German socialist did not

understand exactly how the process of random selection worked, and he conflated Darwinism with Lamarckism. As a result, he formulated a theory that was a curious mixture of Humboldtian methodology, Darwinism, and Lamarckism, in which geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural elements continually reshaped the physical structure of human beings.

Nonetheless, Douai came to political conclusions that were not far away from those of his intellectual mentors. Douai believed in the physical diversity of human races, but he was also a “progressive” Lamarckian and therefore believed that the biological features of human races were in constant flux. Even the groups at the lower levels of the human scale of development could improve for the better and rapidly ascend to the top of the scale by exposing themselves to the correct geographical circumstances. Douai’s case attests to the fact that the adoption of scientific racialism was not necessarily tied to the defense of white supremacy. While arguing that at present white superiority was a reality, Douai also contended that it was desirable for other races to improve their racial stock and join the white group at the top of the scale of human evolution. Moreover, there were other elements of his theory that brought him to progressive political positions: for example, given the comprehensiveness of his theory, Douai paid special attention to the impact of social and economic conditions on the development of human groups, an aspect of his work that increased the acuteness of his political commentaries. Douai was one of the few socialists in this period who openly called for the organization of African Americans in the South; and in 1879 he voiced his opposition to the closure of the Western border in the debate on Chinese immigration.⁴⁵ Finally, he was a staunch supporter of immigration, because he believed that the continuous intermingling of people improved the biological stock of the American population.⁴⁶

The Inevitability of Darwinism: Paul Grottkau and August Otto-Walster

Douai was arguably the only socialist intellectual to employ such detailed theories of race in his work, but many others also used Darwinism as an interpretative lens to discuss the contrasts between different racial and ethnic groups. For the generation that followed Douai’s—born in pre-unification Germany in the 1830s and 1840s—it was no longer a question of needing a holistic explanation of the differences between human groups. They had grown up in an intellectual milieu where the presence of a “theory of evolution,” expressed in scientific terms, had ceased to be a novelty. For them, on the contrary, the problem was to determine to what extent the theory of evolution could be used to interpret human facts. *The Socialist* reported an opinion on Darwinism that perfectly contextualized this issue:

It seems blind absurdity to attempt an explanation of human nature on the theory of evolution. The theory utterly fails to even hint at the facts with which we are confronted, when we begin to study the *moral* side of human life. The law of the survival of the fittest might have produced excellent *teeth* and *claws*, but it could never have evolved the *human heart* ... This theory of man’s origin is becoming popular on account of the materialistic tendency of modern thought, and is fast supplanting the old ideas derived from traditional superstition; but it must forever be rejected by those who discern the spiritual mysteries of human life.⁴⁷

The article shed light on a historical development that went beyond the debate on race diversity then being conducted in the socialist movement. The contrast mentioned by the correspondent, between the “traditional superstition,” and the “theory of evolution,” juxtaposed the scientific paradigms developed after 1850 to centuries-old religious philosophies imbedded in society.

Historian Alfred Kelly has an in-depth analysis of how Darwin’s theories were received in pre-unified Germany, a place of origin, time frame, and system of education shared by all the German American socialists discussed in this article. In the nineteenth century, the German states were at the forefront of academic research in biology and the natural sciences, and they pioneered the modern university system of education.⁴⁸ Darwin’s *Origin* was translated into German in 1860 and his theories enjoyed a vast and immediate circulation. Kelly emphasizes that this diffusion of ideas not only affected the academic elite but was also a genuine popular process, with a great variety of writers publishing widely circulating rather amateurish versions of Darwin’s theories. According to Kelly, the success of Darwinism needs to be contextualized within wider political and intellectual trends. Germans welcomed Darwin’s evolutionism because it attacked the centuries-old ideologies defended by authoritarian institutions such as the Catholic Church. They saw it as an aspect of the human progress that would eventually overthrow illiberal institutions such as the Prussian autocracy and bring them political freedom. Darwin’s theory was liberating because it rid the German intellectual world of the dualism between humans and animals (and in turn that between the spiritual and the physical) that had characterized German philosophy for the previous two centuries. It was not by chance, contends Kelly, that by the end of the century many German socialists were strong advocates of Darwinism.⁴⁹

The material published by the German-language socialist press in the United States confirms what Alfred Kelly has suggests. German American socialists of the 1870s not only embraced Darwinism, they saw it as fully compatible with their socialist doctrine and applicable to the American context. In May 1878, the *Chicagoer Vorbote* published an article by Paul Grottkau titled “Darwinism in the Economic and Political World.” Born in Berlin in 1846, Grottkau had been a member of the Lassallean *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiter-Verein* (General German Workers’ Association) and editor of the *Berliner Freie Presse*. He was warmly welcomed by the German American socialist community in Chicago when he first arrived there at the beginning of 1878. His fame in Germany certainly facilitated his career in the local socialist movement, and within six months of his arrival, he was nominated editor of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* and the *Chicagoer Vorbote*, the daily and weekly papers of the Chicago chapter of the SLP.⁵⁰

In his article, Grottkau explained why Darwinism was so popular among employers and the ruling class:

The bourgeoisie cheers Darwinism, because it thinks that with this hard, inhuman doctrine of naked and brutal struggle it can justify the legitimacy of the capitalist mode of production. Because, so these gentlemen say, each person fights for his existence, and only the better, the more appropriate survives, whereas those who go down have no right to exist.⁵¹

Grottkau did not contest the interpretation of Darwinism furnished by the capitalists. In his opinion, the fact that the “struggle for existence” ruled political and economic relations was based on scientific evidence. But he did show the way in which Darwinism and socialism could coexist just as easily. Grottkau argued that in this

phase of history, according to the Darwinian process, it was legitimate for bigger businesses to destroy and incorporate smaller businesses, just as in the future, it would be legitimate for the socialist Cooperative Commonwealth (the largest possible form of economic production), to destroy and incorporate capitalist businesses.⁵²

Grottkau was not the only one to hold this position within the SLP. August Otto-Walster expressed similar opinions in his writings. Otto-Walster was born in Dresden in 1834. In 1869 he worked in the *Dresdner Volkszeitung* and cooperated with August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht to found the Marxist *Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei* (Social-Democratic Labour Party). In 1876, Otto-Walster relocated to New York after accepting the offer of the SLP to work as editor of the official paper *Arbeiter Stimme*. In 1878, he moved to St. Louis to become the editor of the *Volksstimme des Westens*, a step forward in his career, considering that St. Louis had one of the largest chapters of the party and the *Volksstimme* was one of the few socialist dailies in America.⁵³

In October 1878, Otto-Walster commented in the press on a talk given by Oscar Schmidt, an early supporter of Darwinism. In this talk, Schmidt had rejected the idea that Darwin's theory and socialism were compatible. A debate on the topic had exploded in 1877 in Germany after Rudolf Virchow, a renowned physician, argued that Darwinism should not be taught in schools because it was dangerous, a view confirmed by the fact that even socialists embraced it. Virchow's stance provoked a hostile reaction from Darwinian scientists. Zoologist Ernst Haeckel, by far the most celebrated and popular advocate of Darwinism in Germany, vehemently attacked Virchow. Haeckel argued that Darwinism had scientifically proved the inequality of men and therefore was at odds with the egalitarianism of socialism. The Virchow-Haeckel debate had a long echo in Germany, not only because the two men involved were so renewed, but also because the debate had mixed scientific controversies and politics, and had done so at a moment when socialism in Germany was far from popular.⁵⁴

Otto-Walster was keenly aware of the German reverberations from this debate, and he took the occasion of Schmidt's talk to examine the issue:

Socialism does not state that all men have the same predispositions, but rather demands that in the struggle for existence the individual be granted the most complete use of all his inborn qualities, so as, for example, not to throw up as an unhappy winner an ignorant yet devoted millionaire like Vanderbilt.⁵⁵

Otto-Walster sought a way to make Darwinism and socialism harmonious. He argued that socialism did not contest the Darwinian principle that men and women were unequal and that the struggle for existence regulated social intercourse. But he insisted that socialism did demand fair and equal rules of engagement, so that everyone could have the chance to use their qualities and succeed in the struggle. Otto-Walster, for his part, aimed to attack pro-bourgeois biases, but was ultimately at ease with a social model that implied structural inequality.

The opinions of Adolph Douai, on the one hand, and those of Paul Grottkau and August Otto-Walster, on the other, exemplify the way in which German American socialists approached differences of race in the 1870s and early 1880s. In this period the SLP became a site where scientific theories of evolutionism were regularly deployed to conceptualize and explain racial differences. Still, American socialists did not produce a single and coherent position on the topic. By taking into account the intellectual debate in pre-unified Germany and by describing the generational differences within

the German American socialist community, one can, nevertheless, identify two general approaches to the issue. The first is characterized by the early nineteenth-century eclectic mix of Darwinism and pre-Darwinian geographical determinism represented by Douai, and the second is Grottkau's and Otto-Walster's attempts to amalgamate Darwinism and socialism. While not being anti-egalitarian or racist in themselves, these approaches conceded the possibility that structural inequality, based on biological, social, and economic conditions, was a reality inscribed in the natural, rather than man-made, laws that governed human interaction. This concession severely weakened the emancipatory power of the political message socialist activists were trying to spread.

Anti-Darwinist Approaches: The Strengths and Limits of Color-Blind Internationalism

Marx and Engels welcomed the publication of Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* with enthusiasm. In 1859, Engels wrote to his friend:

Darwin, by the way, whom I'm reading just now, is absolutely splendid. There was one aspect of teleology that had yet to be demolished, and that has now been done. Never before has so grandiose an attempt been made to demonstrate historical evolution in Nature, and certainly never to such good effect.⁵⁶

As the quotation aptly shows, the aspect of the theory that both Marx and Engels enjoyed most was its capacity to explain evolution without religion. Marx confirmed this idea two years later. In presenting Darwin's book to Ferdinand Lassalle, he wrote:

Despite all imperfections [in Darwin's manner of developing his argument], here for the first time teleology in the natural sciences is not only dealt a mortal blow, but its rational sense is also empirically explained.⁵⁷

Marx's and Engels's enthusiasm was an expression of the anti-spiritualist sentiment generated in Germany by the liberating theories of Darwin. The two socialist philosophers were looking for confirmation of their materialism. Darwin's theory provided a powerful argument against Hegelian idealism, the model in contrast to which Marx and Engels had framed dialectical materialism. As stressed by historian Richard Weikart, however, the German philosophers did not incorporate any other aspects of Darwin's theory into their theoretical plan. By the time Marx read Darwin's work, contends Weikart, the key tenets of his materialistic methodology were already in place. Marx's understanding of the world was based on the distinction between human and animal. His theory was devoted to explaining the dynamics that regulated human interaction. Biology and natural sciences were peripheral areas in Marx's system of thought. Therefore, continues Weikart, "Marx's evolutionary view of society did not in any way derive from or depend on biological evolution."⁵⁸

Given Marx's lack of focus on the natural sciences, it is not surprising that the German American socialists who most closely followed Marx and Engels were less proactive when it came to embracing Darwinist approaches. This difference is evident in the opinions expressed in the *Labor Standard*, the newspaper controlled by the SLP group that considered trade unionism to be the primary work of the party. This group was composed of former members of the North American section of the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA) and recent immigrants to the

United States, mostly English-speaking and located in New England and New York. Among its more prominent leaders were Friedrich A. Sorge and Joseph P. McDonnell, the editor of the *Labor Standard* from 1876.

Sorge was a veteran supporter of Marxism in the United States. He arrived in the country after the failure of the 1848 revolutions in Europe and lived in the New York City area. He served as Secretary of the North American Federation of the IWMA from 1867 to 1872, and as General Secretary from 1872 to 1874. From the late 1860s, he kept up a regular correspondence with Marx and Engels, which continued through his activity within the SLP.⁵⁹ McDonnell was born in Dublin in 1847. During his youth, which was spent between Dublin and London, McDonnell had been a vocal advocate of Irish nationalism, a supporter of the Paris Commune, and a member of the IWMA, serving as the organization's Ireland secretary in the early 1870s. McDonnell had been jailed several times for his political activities, and Herbert G. Gutman notes that on his arrival in New York in 1872 "few other immigrants carried to industrializing America so full and so complete a set of radical credentials."⁶⁰

Leaders like McDonnell and Sorge brought to the SLP the internationalist inspiration that had animated the IWMA, as clearly explained in the *Labor Standard* in 1877:

If capital does not care to import French Canadians, Italians, Poles and heathen Chinese by the ten thousand, to abate the wages of labor and increase its own profits, what more necessary thing have we to do than to organize ourselves with the laborers of all nations to keep the wolf from the door first, and to break down private capital next?⁶¹

In the *Labor Standard* the problem of national and racial differences was rarely analyzed in itself. The issue was more often mentioned in connection with the dynamics of the job market and immigration. In this context, the interests of the American workers were never given first place. Instead, McDonnell focused on what workers shared, their class circumstances, and downplayed the importance of what divided them, their national differences.

On July 7 1877, the *Labor Standard* published an article written by its correspondent "Middleton" (a pseudonym). McDonnell so warmly embraced the content of this piece that he decided to forgo his own weekly column to make space for Middleton's. Middleton started by explaining why American wages were decreasing so rapidly: as a consequence of global interconnection, high American wages had fallen to the level of low European wages. At this point, "having exhausted the civilized world in the hunt for cheap labor," capitalists had turned to China.⁶² But Middleton did not indulge any protectionist temptation, arguing: "it is useless to prevent the importation of the products of cheap labor, so long as we import the cheap laborer." Middleton adamantly made his case by declaring that "the best protection for labor at home, is the improvement of the *Laborer* abroad."⁶³ He refused to place any blame on the workers immigrating to the United States:

The French, German, English, Irish, Italian, or even Chinaman are not less fond of high wages than the American. No better evidence of this is needed, than the fact that they will leave their homes, their friends, and all the social conditions under which they have lived from childhood, and come to a country whose whole manners and customs, and even the very language, are all entirely strange, if not

repulsive, to them. All this they will do in order to obtain *high wages*. It is therefore clear that their object is to improve their own condition, rather than impair ours.⁶⁴

Whereas Douai, Grottkau, and Otto-Walster accepted the idea that inequality and competition between human groups were unavoidable aspects of human interaction, Middleton chose to stress the similarities between the situations of workers around the world. He identified economic circumstances as the real problem that forced people to leave their countries of origin. In this way, he suggested a change of perspective that suddenly made anti-immigration appeals seem totally incompatible with the most basic values of human decency.

The trade unionists of the SLP did not focus only on immigration and national differences, they also concentrated on racial inequality. In a speech McDonnell gave to a crowd in New York during the Great Strike of 1877, the *Labor Standard* editor celebrated the interracial unity of workers by declaring that “it was a grand sight to see in West Virginia, white and colored men standing together, men of all nationalities on one supreme contest for the common rights of the workingmen. The barriers of ignorance and prejudice were fast falling before the growing intelligence of the masses. Hereafter there shall be no north, no south, no east, no west, only one land of labor and the workingmen must own and possess it.”⁶⁵ Class solidarity, according to McDonnell, should make no exceptions. He thought that the worsening of the workers’ situation opened new spaces for them to unite despite their proclivity to balk at ethnic and racial differences.

Throughout the twentieth century, historians and philosophers on the left have repeatedly stressed the limits of color-blind and race-blind approaches. With their fixation on class inequality, they have argued, these points of view have systematically failed to recognize, understand, and engage with the specific social and economic circumstances created by racial discrimination in the United States.⁶⁶ These criticisms can equally be applied to the color-blind internationalist position expounded by SLP members in the 1870s. However, placing socialist opinions within the historical context of the time may help to better understanding the strengths and limits of their point of view. In a social and intellectual situation in which theories of race, Darwinism and exclusivist nationalisms nurtured and reinforced tensions and divisions along lines of race, ethnicity, and class, these socialists found themselves swimming against the tide. As the opinions of Douai, Grottkau, and Otto-Walster made clear, in this period theories of race had deeply penetrated all social classes, becoming modern frameworks that required articulated intellectual responses. However, socialists supporting color-blind points of view decided to remain faithful to their approach. They rejected the idea suggested by scientific racialism that some human beings were inferior because of their race or ethnicity, and they did not concede the point that humans could be different according to the place where they were born. Color-blind socialists maintained that, despite physical differences, humans were essentially all the same. They were all disinclined to abandon their homes, families, and friends, and they were all animated by the same needs, such as the urgency to improve their economic situation. In this way, color-blind socialists articulated a significantly advanced position for their time that, despite its flaws, put them at the very forefront of the progressive spectrum of labor movements of the time.

The SLP from Color-Blind Internationalism to Scientific Racialism

At the foundation of the party, the scientific racialism of Douai, Grottkau, and Otto-Walster and the color-blind internationalism of Sorge and McDonnell were

equally represented in the SLP. However, the coexistence of these two contradictory points of view did not last long. The precarious compromise that held together the different socialist organizations scattered around the country started to crumble almost immediately after the founding event of 1876. Even though neat lines of separation are difficult to draw, it is possible to suggest that color-blind internationalists were mostly located in the New York area, in Detroit, and in Chicago, while supporters of scientific racialism were more regularly spread in all the areas where the SLP had chapters, namely the Northeast and the Midwest. This division was replicated almost faithfully in the split that divided the SLP in 1877–1878. During the founding meeting, Sorge had made clear that he and his faction would stay in the SLP only as long as the new unified party avoided any sort of electoral activity. However, this condition was broken almost immediately. A couple of months after the end of the meeting, the Newark section of the SLP, led by Peter J. McGuire, ran candidates in some local elections. This episode opened a year-long quarrel between the Sorge and McDonnell-led group based in the New York area and the rest of the organization, with socialists exchanging heated accusations in all three of the party's papers.⁶⁷ Paradoxically, the matter was settled in favor of supporters of political action by a series of trade union-led protests, namely the Great Strike of 1877. This upsurge in activism caused a sudden increase in the socialist vote, especially in some cities like Cincinnati and Chicago, and allowed the supporters of the ballot box to overtake and exclude their rivals. Apolitical Sorgeans formally remained in the SLP until the end of 1877, but they did not even take part in the second Congress of the party in December 1877, and by 1878 had founded their own organization, the International Labor Union (ILU), with the *Labor Standard* acting as its official paper.⁶⁸ With the departure of the Sorgean group, color-blind internationalism became a minority position defended only by small groups in Chicago and Detroit, with scientific racialism being the most common sensibility among the remaining supporters of the party.

The outcome of this factional fight over the political strategies of the party, won by supporters of political action, had a significant impact on the SLP's racial politics. As seen above, the color-blind position supported by the *Labor Standard* group was based on clear guidelines. Internationalists offered piecemeal improvements, obtained through industrial action and small-scale organization. Not running at political elections meant not being forced to back political policies antithetical to socialist ideals (the closure of the Pacific borders, for example) solely for electoral reasons. In turn, this gave them the chance to campaign across the color line, an activity that rarely met with widespread support at the ballot box. On the other hand, the scientific racialism of Douai, Grottkau, and Otto-Walster left more room for flexibility and interpretation. Scientific racialists took political stances that were more malleable, and could be bent to follow the will of the electorate and be adapted to the changing intellectual context of the time. On Chinese immigration, after 1877 the SLP did not defend the same racist position as the Workingmen's Party of California, opting for a request to stop the importation of "coolies under contract" rather than a halt to all Chinese immigration.⁶⁹ This position was clearly a compromise between conflicting points of view, and it allowed the permanence in the party of a California section that was opposed to Chinese immigration.⁷⁰ On race in the South, in 1880 the SLP approved a resolution that urged "workers in the South, regardless of color, to unite with their brothers of the North" to fight against capitalists for the fruits of their labor.⁷¹ However, the party struggled to translate this invitation to interracial cooperation into practical action. In the period I examine, the number of African American members in the SLP was

negligible, and the few sections of the party located in parts of the country with significant African American communities, such as St. Louis and Cincinnati, did not include significant numbers of black workers.⁷² Had the color-blind faction controlled the SLP after 1877, the behavior of the biggest socialist organization in the United States on Chinese immigration and the “Negro Question” would have likely been significantly different. Analyzing the history of the party through the lens of racial politics helps to reconstruct the circumstances in which socialists of the time made their decisions, and the way in which American workers assessed them.

Racial politics also helps to interpret the historical legacies of the contraposition animating the SLP in this period. Color-blind internationalism and scientific racialism had different impacts on U.S. labor history. Those who remained in the party after 1878 continued to support an unclear and unsuccessful approach to race. The record of the SLP in the 1880s is characterized by evident cases of white supremacism (the party was fervently anti-Chinese after 1882) and a general silence on other issues such as the situation of African Americans in the South and the annihilation of Native Americans on the Western frontier.⁷³ Conversely, supporters of color-blind internationalism remained active in their attempts to organize American workers beyond racial division. The history of the International Labor Union was not particularly successful. The ILU enlisted among its members some old activists of the eight-hour movement, such as Ira Steward and George E. McNeill, even though these former NLU members no longer held prominent positions of leadership among American workers.⁷⁴ According to Sorge himself, the ILU managed to organize some successful events in New England, but after a couple of years the organization was dismantled. In his 1890s series of articles in the *Neue Zeit*, Sorge blamed the repressive anti-trade union regulations for the early failure of his organization. Even if the meeting called by the ILU attracted large turnouts, he argued, the organizers could not find workers who agreed to be president or secretary of their assemblies, let alone enroll in the organization, because having their names published in the *Labor Standard* would have guaranteed a swift dismissal from their workplace. Despite decent results, then, the union was forced to close in 1880.⁷⁵

However, the color-blind internationalism of the ILU did not disappear from the world of organized American labor. The promotion of piecemeal measures to improve the lot of workingmen and women without distinction of race and ethnicity returned as a key aspect of the action of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. Not only that, but the Knights put into practice the intuition of Middleton. Animated by the conviction that organizing workers *in loco* was the best strategy against cheap labor, they actually opened sections of the trade union federation in Europe and attempted to tackle the problem of immigration by improving the conditions of potential immigrants at home, similarly to earlier attempts by the IWMA in the 1860s and what the ILU wanted to do in the 1870s.⁷⁶

Former members of the ILU and of the SLP contributed to the success of the Knights. Labor historian Richard Oestreicher has documented the fluid process that brought the Detroit section of the SLP to become the organizing infrastructure of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s.⁷⁷ The reasons of this evolution were rather straightforward. The political successes of the SLP in the late 1870s proved to be rather short lived, and by the beginning of the 1880s socialists were looking for new ways to attract workers to their ranks. Those groups who still supported trade unionism in the Detroit and Chicago sections of the party were quick to resume their political action and affiliate with the Knights in their recruiting job. If pursuing their ideals meant abandoning

the SLP, these activists were ready to do that. The ideals of ethnic and racial equality sketched by ILU members were translated into deeds by the Knights of Labor. Sorge and his group indicated a possible alternative that many socialists were ready to embrace in the 1880s.

Conclusions

In this article, an analysis of socialist opinions of race has been conducted with the objective of offering a more precise reconstruction of the history of the SLP and a renewed appreciation of its historical legacy. By analyzing socialist racial thought in conjunction with the early history of the SLP, I have contended that the party was founded on a precarious compromise between color-blind internationalists and scientific racialists, a compromise that rapidly fell apart in 1877, leaving a socialist movement divided and embittered. These circumstances influenced the ways in which Gilded Age socialists framed their political action after 1878. If scientific racialism continued to characterize the confused and irrelevant approach of the SLP in the 1880s, color-blind internationalism extended its influence beyond organized socialism, both in the ILU and in the Knights of Labor.

While offering a fresh perspective on the political history of Gilded Age American socialism, the debate conducted in the SLP between 1876 and 1882 additionally generates wider implications on the historiography of socialism and race at the turn of the century. In 2018, Paul Heideman has pointedly noted that “early socialists’ discussion of the color line is treated as little more than a prelude to the more important advances made in the 1930s,” when the Communist Party of the United States elaborated a political platform that attracted significant numbers of African Americans members into the party.⁷⁸ While Heideman refers to Progressive Era socialism, I contend that his assessment can easily be extended up to the period discussed in this article.

This article presents an image of a Gilded Age American socialist movement that was much more international, inventive, and original than historians have hitherto acknowledged. By reinterpreting ethnicity as a key feature of the socialist movement of the period and by placing it at the center of transnational exchange of ideas, this article has explored how socialists sought innovative ways to turn socialism into a convincing political approach from within a detrimental intellectual context that valued scientific racialism as a modern and indisputable scientific doctrine. In their attempts to fit with the zeitgeist, at times socialists diluted the emancipatory strength of their doctrine. Theories of race provided socialists of the 1870s and 1880s with methods to rationalize and structure their discourses about ethnic and racial diversity, and the relation they had with economic dynamics. These discourses rarely melded with exclusivist nationalist ideas or supremacist beliefs based on “Aryan” and “Teutonic” mythologies; nor did they automatically turn into racist positions against minorities. However, more often than not they opened the way to disenchanting political strategies, where the differences between races were accepted as fixed. Yet the opinions of intellectuals like Adolph Douai attest to socialist efforts to swim against the tide and present progressive versions of scientific determinism. Analyzing Gilded Age socialist opinions adds a multitude of nuances to a socialist discourse on race that started well before the moment historians have traditionally acknowledged.

At the same time, an analysis of the Gilded Age socialism takes us to the very origin of a debate on race and class that resonates far beyond the period discussed and that continues to shape contemporary left-liberal political discourse. The contrast between

color-blind internationalists and scientific racialists that animated the SLP in the 1876–1882 period questioned the ability of the socialist movement to go past its allegiance to class solidarity and see other aspects—like race—as key factors shaping working class relationships in the United States. Paradoxically, for the period discussed, scientific racialists had a more original, if controversial, record to show than their color-blind internationalist counterparts. With their attempts to square scientific racialism with socialist doctrine, leaders like Douai, Grottkau, and Otto-Walster dedicated attention to the problems created by race that color-blind internationalists rarely matched. But color-blind internationalists responded with a commitment to working-class solidarity that was extraordinary in the context of the time. Their firm defense of an open-border policy, in a time when hardly anyone else in the labor community supported similar political stances, attests to the principled nature of this small group of working-class leaders.

Debates on immigration and class reductionism have occupied the thoughts of generations of left-wing militants, and they are still at the center of public debate today. In a moment when the United States is led by a president who won the elections on the promise of building a wall to defend the country from illegal immigration and the Democratic Party has a self-proclaimed socialist as one of its most popular leaders, we have the occasion to appreciate how divisive and controversial for late-nineteenth century Americans the issues discussed in the Gilded Age socialist press were. Today, the scientific racialist language used by the socialist Leo to reject Chinese immigration would be totally unacceptable. But it is doubtful that his appeal to close the borders would fall on deaf ears. The problems on race, class, and immigration that socialists discussed in the Gilded Age would continue to be at the center of attention for many years to come.

Notes

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1 Leo, “The Chinese Question Again – Leo’s Reply,” *The Socialist*, Mar. 8, 1879.

2 Cf. Robert C. Bannister, ed., *On Liberty, Society and Politics: The Essential Essays of William Graham Sumner* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1992).

3 Leo, “The Chinese Question Again – Leo’s Reply,” *The Socialist*, Mar. 8, 1879.

4 Leo, “The Chinese Problem,” *The Socialist*, Feb. 15, 1879.

5 Mark Pittenger’s *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) is somewhat of an exception. However, his analysis focuses on evolutionist theories to the detriment of race.

6 Cf. Philip S. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 94–150; Sally M. Miller, *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Twentieth-Century Socialism* (London: Garland, 1996), 5–9.

7 William P. Jones, “‘Nothing Special to Offer the Negro’: Revisiting the ‘Debsian View’ of the Negro Question,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (Fall 2008): 212–24. Recently, Paul M. Heideman has significantly contributed to give a richer and more comprehensive description of Progressive Era socialist opinions on race in the collection *Class Struggle and the Color Line*. This work attests to the intellectual vitality of the debates on race, socialism, and communism in the American

Left in the 1900–1930 period. Cf. *Class Struggle and the Color Line: American Socialism and the Race Question, 1900–1930*, ed. Paul M. Heideman (London: Verso, 2018).

8 Cf. the already mentioned Miller, *Race, Ethnicity and Gender*; but also, Jeffrey B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883–1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 26–29.

9 The first name of the party in 1876 was “Workingmen’s Party of the United States.” The organization adopted a new denomination—Socialistic Labor Party—at the 1877 Congress in Newark. Progressively throughout the 1880s, “Socialistic” was abandoned in favor of the more widely used “Socialist.” Cf. Philip S. Foner, *The Formation of the Workingmen’s Party of the United States: Proceedings of the Union Congress Held at Philadelphia, July 19–22, 1876* (New York: American Institute for Marxist Studies, 1876); Socialistic Labor Party, *Platform, Constitution, and Resolutions, Adopted at the National Congress of the Workingmen’s Party of the United States, Held at Newark (N.J.), December 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 1877* (Cincinnati: Ohio Volks-Zeitung Print, 1878).

10 Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1963), 31.

11 Seymour Martin Lipset, Gary Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here. Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 138.

12 The party did not keep regular lists of members. It is, therefore, difficult to reconstruct the precise dimension of the different ethnic groups with the party. However, scholars agree on placing the percentage of German Americans between the 80 and 90 percent. Cf. Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (1903; repr., New York: Russel & Russel, 1965), 213; Hartmut Keil, “German Working-Class Immigration and the Social Democratic Tradition of Germany” in *German Workers’ Culture in the United States 1850 to 1920*, ed. Hartmut Keil (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 7.

13 Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880), 538–39.

14 Ibid.

15 A selection of literature on the impact of German immigrants in the second half of the nineteenth century include Stan Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion and Class in New York City, 1845–1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Bruce C. Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Mischa Honeck, *We are Revolutionists: German-speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Alison Clark Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship in the Civil War Era* (Washington, DC; Cambridge: German Historical Institute; Cambridge University Press, 2013). On German Americans in the American radical world, cf. Keil, “German Working-Class Immigration”; Stan Nadel, “The German Immigrant Left in the United States” in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, eds. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts. Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States. A History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 2013), 19–57.

16 The SLP achieved its peak of influence in the 1890s under the leadership of Daniel De Leon. However, in the late 1870s the party gathered many prominent labor and radical leaders, from the future Haymarket martyr Albert R. Parsons to founders of the American Federation of Labor Peter J. McGuire and Adolph Strasser to the prominent leader of the labor movement of Detroit Jo Labadie. The influence of the early SLP faded in the early 1880s, when many abandoned the party and joined the anarchist movement or trade unions such as the AFL or the Knights of Labor. For references on the history of the SLP, the most accurate work remains: Selig Perlman, “Upheaval and Reorganisation (from 1877)” in John Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States*, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1935–36), 2:269–90. On De Leon and the SLP in the 1890s, cf. Glen Seretan, *Daniel De Leon: The Odyssey of an American Marxist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Stephen Coleman, *Daniel De Leon* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990).

17 Historian Hartmut Keil has detailed how the relationship between German socialists in the United States and Germany evolved in the 1870s and 1880s. Cf. Keil, “German Working-Class Immigration,” 7–14.

- 18 Classic works on the “transatlantic space” and the left include James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998). On transatlantic ties between the United States and Germany, cf. Axel R. Schäfer, *American Progressives and German Social Reform, 1875–1920* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
- 19 On pre-Darwinian concepts of race, cf. Laura Dassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Sara Eigen Figal and Mark Larrimore, *The German Invention of Race* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006).
- 20 The understanding of Darwinism of German American socialists was shaped by the ways in which Darwin’s theories were received in Germany. Cf. Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in the Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League* (London: Macdonald, 1971); Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Richard Weikart, *Socialist Darwinism: Evolution in German Socialist Thought from Marx to Bernstein* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999); Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- 21 Foner, *The Formation*, 16–19.
- 22 Firsthand sources on Adolph Douai’s life include Adolph Douai, *Autobiography of Dr. Adolf Douai, Revolutionist of 1848, Texas Pioneer, Introducer of the Kindergarten, Educator, Author, Editor, 1819–1888*, trans. and ed. Richard H. Douai Böker, 1959, folder 2, Adolph Douai Papers, Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas, Austin; “Our Loss,” *Workmen’s Advocate* (New York), Jan. 28, 1888; “Adolph Douai: The gifted and tireless agitator dead,” *Workmen’s Advocate* (New York), Jan. 28, 1888. For scholars’ treatments of his life, cf. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 15–29; Justine Davis Randers-Pehrson, *Adolf Douai, 1819–1888: The Turbulent Life of a German Forty-Eighter in the Homeland and in the United States* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Honeck, *We Are Revolutionists*, 38–70.
- 23 Foner, *The Formation*, 17.
- 24 Adolph Douai, “Die Geographie der Menschen,” *San Antonio Zeitung*, Apr. 4, 1854; Adolph Douai, *Land und Leute in der Union* (Berlin: Otto Janke, 1864).
- 25 Douai, *Autobiography*, 37.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 144.
- 27 Adolph Douai, “Abstammung und Anpassung beim Menschengeschlecht,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, Dec. 7, 1878. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German are my own.
- 28 The most common way in which intellectual historians have analyzed the impact of evolutionism in this period is through the contested concept of “social Darwinism.” Cf. Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
- 29 Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 45.
- 30 Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (1748; repr. New York: The Colonial Press, 1899), 224.
- 31 Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution. The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 90–150.
- 32 Bowler, *Evolution*, 156–64.
- 33 Bowler, *Evolution*, 151–86.
- 34 Adolph Douai, “Abstammung und Anpassung beim Menschengeschlecht,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, Dec. 7, 1878.
- 35 Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 271.
- 36 “Abstammung und Anpassung beim Menschengeschlecht,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, Dec. 28, 1878.
- 37 “Abstammung und Anpassung beim Menschengeschlecht,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, Dec. 14, 1878.
- 38 “Abstammung und Anpassung beim Menschengeschlecht,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, Dec. 28, 1878.

- 39 Nicolaas A. Rupke, *Alexander von Humboldt: a Metabiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1–27; Walls, *Passage to Cosmos*, 12–48.
- 40 Sandra Nichols, “Why was Humboldt forgotten in the United States?,” *Geographical Review* 96:3 (July 2006), 399–415.
- 41 Walls, *Passage to Cosmos*, 120–29; Nichols, “Why was Humboldt,” 405.
- 42 Randers-Pehrson, *Adolf Douai*, 257–58. During the commemoration, Douai entered in a dispute with a protégé of the renowned naturalist Louis Agassiz, who had celebrated Humboldt for his religious faith. Douai, a fierce atheist, slandered his intervention on the stage, and was later attacked by Agassiz himself. Cf. Randers-Pehrson, *Adolph Douai*, 259–60.
- 43 Quoted in Walls, *Passage to Cosmos*, 175.
- 44 Ibid. Humboldt’s theory of human differences, with its emphasis on diversity and the impossibility of classifying human differences, was an antecedent of Franz Boas’s cultural pluralism. Cf. Matti Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to the Anthropological Concept of Culture” in *Volkszeit as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Jr. Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).
- 45 For Douai’s opinions on African Americans, cf. Adolph Douai, “Something more about the farming population,” *Labor Standard* (New York), May 4, 1878; Adolph Douai, “Die Negerfrage,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, Feb. 22, 1879; on Douai and Chinese immigration, Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 131.
- 46 Cf. Adolph Douai, “The real number of foreign-born inhabitants of the U. St.,” *San Antonio Zeitung*, Nov. 25, 1854.
- 47 “Darwinism,” *The Socialist* (Chicago), Sept. 28, 1878. Emphasis in the original. The article was originally published in *The Index*, the journal of the Free Religious Association of Boston.
- 48 Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin*, 3–35.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Hartmut Keil, “German Immigrant Working-Class,” 165; John B. Jentz and Richard Schneirov, *Chicago in the Age of Capital. Class, Politics and Democracy During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 221–33.
- 51 Paul Grottkau, “Der Darwinismus in der ökonomischen und politischen Welt,” *Chicagoer Vorbote*, May 11, 1878.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 August Otto-Walster, *Leben und Werk: eine Auswahl mit unveröffentlichten Briefen an Karl Marx* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966); Hartmut Keil, “A Profile of Editors of German-American Radical Press, 1850–1910” in *The German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture*, eds. Elliot Shore, Ken Fones-Wolf, and James P. Danky (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 21.
- 54 Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin*, 58–61; the reaction of Ernst Haeckel to Virchow’s comments has subsequently become central to a debate that still divides scholars on the connections between Haeckel and Nazism. Cf. Gasman, *The Scientific Origins*; Hawkins, *Social Darwinism*; Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
- 55 August Otto-Walster, “Darwinismus und Socialdemokratie” in *Volksstimme des Westens* (St. Louis), Oct. 13, 1878.
- 56 Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, Dec. 11, 1859. Quoted in Richard Weikart, *Socialist Darwinism*, 22.
- 57 Karl Marx to Ferdinand Lassalle, Jan. 16, 1861. Quoted in Weikart, *Socialist Darwinism*, 23.
- 58 Weikart, *Socialist Darwinism*, 22. On Marx, Engels and their ideas on Darwin and evolutionism, cf. also Pittenger, *American Socialists*, 15–25.
- 59 Philip S. Foner, “Friedrich Adolph Sorge: ‘Father of Modern Socialism in America’” in Friedrich A. Sorge, *Friedrich A. Sorge’s Labor Movement in the United States. A History of the American Working Class from Colonial Times to 1890*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Brewster Chamberlin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 3–41.
- 60 Herbert G. Gutman, “Joseph P. McDonnell and the Workers’ Struggle in Paterson, New Jersey” in Herbert G. Gutman, *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 1987), 95–98.
- 61 “The Necessity of International Organization,” *Labor Standard* (New York), Jan. 18, 1877.
- 62 Middleton, “The International Labor Congress and American Representation,” *Labor Standard* (New York), July 7, 1877.

63 Ibid.; emphasis in the original.

64 Ibid.; emphasis in the original.

65 Quoted in Philip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York: Pathfinder, 1977), 119–23.

66 Critiques from a historical point of view include Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 57–150; Dawson, *Blacks In and Out*. For a theoretical and philosophical critique, cf. Charles W. Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 126–30; 148–55.

67 Selig Perlman, “Upheaval and Reorganisation (from 1877),” 2:269–90.

68 *Labor Standard* (New York), July 2, 16, and 23, 1877; *National Socialist* (Cincinnati), May 11, 1878.

69 Socialistic Labor Party, *Platform, Constitution, and Resolutions, Adopted at the National Congress of the Workingmen’s Party of the United States. Held at Newark (N.J.)*.

70 Not all the members were satisfied with this compromise. A group of SLP members abandoned the party after the approval of this clause. However, between 1880 and 1882 the SLP adopted a mild anti-Chinese point of view. Cf. “Protest der deutschsprechenden Sektion San Francisco,” *Arbeiter Stimme* (New York), Mar. 24, 1878; “California,” *Labor Standard* (New York), July 29, 1878; “Address to the Party,” *National Socialist* (Cincinnati), Sept. 7, 1878; “Party News,” *Bulletin of the Social Labor Movement* (New York), May 1882; Selig Perlman, “Upheaval and Reorganisation, 2:254.”

71 Socialistic Labor Party, *Platform, Constitution, and Resolutions, Together With a Condensed Report of the Proceedings of the National Convention, Held at Allegheny, Pa., December 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31, 1879, and January 1, 1880* (Detroit: National Executive Committee, 1880), 3.

72 The SLP’s record on African Americans is patchy and inconsistent. For reasons of space, it is not possible to go into details. A more extensive analysis can be found at: Lorenzo Costaguta, “Which Way to Emancipation? Race and Ethnicity in American Socialist Thought, 1876–1899,” (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2017), 140–84. On St. Louis, cf. also “Die Negerwanderung,” *Volksstimme des Westens* (St. Louis), Mar. 17, 1879; “Über die Flucht der Farbigen aus dem Süden,” *Volksstimme des Westens* (St. Louis), Apr. 21, 1879; “Die Negereinwanderung,” *Volksstimme des Westens* (St. Louis), July 15, 1879; “Über Neger-Auswanderung,” *Volksstimme des Westens* (St. Louis), Sept. 22, 1879; Elliott J. Kanter, “Class, Ethnicity, and Socialist Politics: St. Louis, 1876–1881,” *UCLA Historical Journal* 3 (1982): 46–47. On Cincinnati, Nikki M. Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 130–55.

73 Costaguta, “Which Way,” 101–84.

74 Foner, *Workingmen’s Party*, 105–13.

75 Sorge, *Friedrich A. Sorge’s Labor Movement in the United States*, 199.

76 On internationalism and the Knights of Labor, cf. Steven Parfitt, “Brotherhood from a Distance: Americanization and the Internationalism in the Knights of Labor,” *International Review of Social History* 58:3 (Dec. 2013): 463–91.

77 Richard Jules Oestreicher, “Socialism and the Knights of Labor,” *Labor History* 22:1 (1981): 5–30; Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875–1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 76–101.

78 Heideman, “Introduction” in *Class Struggle and the Color Line*, 2.