

INTRODUCTION

How to Make a Rope

“THE IDEAL ROPE,” explained the Upson-Walton Company in their 1902 booklet, achieves a tension “so perfect” that if a heavy weight were attached to one end, pulling the rope to its full length, “the weight would not turn.” For such a weight, an industrialist of the period might envision loads of grain, barrels of oil, or cases of precious minerals. For a rancher, bales of wool or bundles of leather might stretch the imaginary cables. The shipper might picture cargo drawn high above the ocean, then lowered gently without rotation onto the docks below. Ropes, however, were commonly enlisted into more nefarious service. Coiled, tangled, or laid flat, each length was potent with malice, thirteen simple twists away from becoming a noose. In the Jim Crow era of vigilante violence and sexual warfare, ropes could fasten commodities as easily as they might bind arms, break necks, or strain against the turning weight of a human body. Neither the mining owner, the shipping magnate, nor the commercial rancher would expect to see such grisly functions portrayed in trade brochures. Nor would they need to. As the history of the nineteenth century had already proven, the means of securing capital were often indistinguishable from the mechanisms of organizing racist terror.¹

In November 1871, the *Chicago Tribune* published an eyewitness account of such terror. Three Black men—Squire Taylor, forty-five, George Johnson, thirty-nine, and Charles Davis, sixty-eight—were kidnapped from a county jail by the Ku Klux Klan and lynched in Charlestown, Indiana. Aware that an “impending mob” was coming that night, the reporter had arranged to sleep in the sheriff’s office, ensuring he was “awake at the hour of the contemplated violence.” When the Klan did arrive, the sheriff refused to unlock the cell doors. The mob proceeded to bludgeon the bars with axes, sledgehammers, and chisels, “white heat sparks follow[ing] every blow.” The reporter observed

how the Klansmen's eyes "seemed to glow" through their masks "like those of famished wolves." For nearly four hours, Taylor, Johnson, and Davis were trapped, watching in horror as the locks before them were battered, their executioners pounding and panting without restraint. Around two in the morning, the sheriff tried to halt further structural damage to the jail. He retrieved the keys from their hiding place in the back of the building. Knotted on a piece of string and anchored to a window bar, the keys swung between the jail's outer walls and the bleak expanse of night. The *Tribune's* article was entitled "Mask and Manilla." The "mask" referred to the Klan's muslin hoods while "manilla" described the "brand new whitish-brown" ropes used to hang the men. Each rope, it noted, had been prepared in advance with a noose, "showing that some one was at work who understood his business."²

Manila, a fiber that Filipinos called *abacá*, was a derivative of the plantain plant. The fibrous bark was ideal for rope, making it one of the most valuable "Indigenous products of the Archipelago," according to mid-nineteenth-century trade guides. Spanish galleons sailing between colonial port cities in the Philippines and Mexico had used manila rope for their rigging. Found to be sturdy, less likely to mold or to be eaten by insects than other fibers, manila imports to the United States grew precipitously after 1850, soon replacing Indian jute and Russian hemp. When the abolitionist John Brown was captured in 1859 trying to spark an armed insurrection of enslaved people in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, southern states competed to deliver the rope to hang him: Kentucky's hemp rope ultimately beat out South Carolina's cotton.³ Manila soon surpassed all these domestically grown fibers. By the turn of the century, manila was the most popular rope-making fiber in the United States, and, as headlines suggested, it was nearly synonymous with rope itself.⁴

The 1902 Upson-Walton booklet observed that a surplus of manila fiber was "brought into our lap" following the 1898 Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War of 1899–1902. The United States had seized imperial control over the Philippines, obtaining a near monopoly over the country's exports, two-thirds of which consisted of manila.⁵ Though demand for the rope-making fiber soared, especially after it was deemed "strategic war material" during World War I, the sustainability of the *abacá* supply was soon cast into doubt. "The user of Manila hemp," reasoned the Waterbury Company in its 1920 catalogue, "is dependent entirely upon our foreign possessions in the far East." This fraught dependence meant that "the procuring of hemp . . . for rope-making is attended with some difficulty."⁶ Indeed, US reliance on manila was imperiled as Filipino workers and rebels fiercely

resisted US imperial policies (just as they had overthrown Spanish colonial rule, from which US governing practices were adapted). Catalogues of US cordage companies in the early twentieth century attest to this industrial and geopolitical crisis. They agree that no solution could be found in a “domestic” market. Rather, for a profitable, plentiful, and stable supply of rope-making fiber, US industrialists had only to look south of their border.⁷

While manila imports declined, US imports of Mexico’s rope-making fibers, henequen and sisal, exploded. Primarily used as agricultural twine to bind bushels of grain and bales of hay, both were easily joined with other fibers to make ropes of varying widths and strengths. Derived from the spiny agave cactus, the fibers (often both described as henequen) grew plentifully in the southernmost Mexican state of Yucatán, a product of its hot, dry climate, its flat landscape, and the unrelenting input of its Indigenous labor force. Beginning in the 1870s, landless Maya Indians had been conscripted to work on henequen plantations or haciendas after their commonly held *ejido* lands were expropriated by the state under the regime of President Porfirio Díaz. Consigned to debt peonage, the Maya had little choice but to accept labor contracts that could be sold or traded among local Yucatecan henequen capitalists, or *henequeneros*, though rarely ever paid off. Locked into debt, the workers faced brutal conditions, long hours, and regular lashings with henequen whips. *Henequeneros* justified the beatings with the adage *Los indios no oyen sino por las nalgas* (“The Indians only hear with their asses”). In addition to exhaustion, injury, and disease, many Maya also succumbed to epidemics of suicide. In 1909, British travel writers insisted that henequen labor regimes had cracked the Indigenous workforce on a “wheel of tyranny so brutal that the heart of them is dead.”⁸

As demand for henequen fiber boomed, *henequeneros* conspired with Mexican federal officials to capture workers from around the country. In a coordinated plan called *el enganche* (“the hook”), thousands of war deserters, prisoners, “vagrants,” and political dissidents, including Huastec Indians from Veracruz and Yaqui Indians from the Northern border, were ensnared. Hunted by the Mexican government as well as US officials, rebellious Yaquis were sent to the Yucatán haciendas in chains, declared by Díaz to be “obstinate enemies of civilization.”⁹ Two thirds of the Yaqui subsequently died. Barbarous labor conditions meant shortened lives for the workers and high turnover rates for the *henequeneros*. Between 1878 and 1910, labor recruiters added an additional ten thousand contract workers from Cuba, Italy, Spain, the Canary Islands, China, Japan, Java, with nearly three thousand from

Korea. Enclosed by barbed wire, disciplined by overseers, and dependent on *tiendas de raya*, company stores that often had jail cells attached, henequen plantations were effectively transformed into a “vast federal prison” for indentured segments of the global working class and so-called *indios bárbaros* (“hostile Indians”). Through debt and corporal punishment, henequen workers were forced to accept hunger, unsanitary conditions, and insufficient medical care. Records reveal that women were routinely coerced into relationships with *henequeneros*, ensuring that the threat of rape or compulsory sexual arrangements menaced every hacienda. Out of these brutal regimes, a motley international force of the criminalized, the violated, and the expropriated produced the raw material of twentieth-century rope.¹⁰

No other company benefitted from Yucatecan henequen more than the Chicago-based McCormick Harvesting Machine Company. McCormick sold agricultural machines that harvested grain and bound it into sheaves using henequen binder twine. These reaper-binder machines scaled up commercial production, enabling agribusiness in the Midwestern United States to explode. Such explosions occurred alongside an intensified expropriation of Indigenous land. Laws like the 1887 Dawes Act privatized millions of acres of communally held tribal lands in the region, enabling their settlement and agglomeration for capitalist agriculture. Through new reaper-binder technology and ongoing settler colonial violence, Native territories in the Midwest were further transmogrified into the nation’s “bread basket.” With J. P. Morgan’s financial backing, McCormick absorbed several major competitors, becoming International Harvester (I. H.) in 1902. I. H. investors learned that a blend of Philippine *abacá* and Mexican henequen made ideal binder twine for Midwest grain and quickly invested in the Yucatán. By 1910, I. H. owned 99.8 percent of the entire Yucatecan fiber trade. In Chicago as in the Yucatán, millionaires pressed wealth from the tangles of international misery.¹¹

Aware of growing concerns over the Yucatán’s labor conditions, I. H. officials addressed the matter in a 1910 issue of their company magazine, writing, “There is nothing in the nature of slavery in Yucatán. Every man is free and receives his pay as regularly as the workman in the American factories.”¹² The statement was unwittingly ironic, given that workers had famously protested against labor conditions in McCormick’s Chicago factories, where the reaper-binder machinery was made. Demanding an eight-hour day with no cut in pay, McCormick’s iron molders had joined thousands of Chicago workers and tens of thousands nationally in a general strike on May 1, 1886, organized by the industrial union the Knights of Labor. On May 3, two striking

McCormick workers were killed by the police. The next day, demonstrators poured into Chicago's Haymarket Square in protest. A bomb went off during the rally and police responded by firing into the crowd. When the dust settled, several men were dead and over a hundred were injured. Eight high-profile activists were arrested and charged with conspiracy to murder. All eight were convicted in a show trial designed to intimidate organized labor. Four organizers—August Spies, Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, and George Engel—were executed in a gruesome public hanging. Before he was hung, Spies shouted from the platform, “The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today.”¹³

If the Knights of Labor had organized under the slogan “an injury to one is the concern of all,” Haymarket demonstrated the maxim's global resonance. Around the world, the first of May became known as International Worker's Day, or May Day. In May 1913, the Yucatán-based Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker) organized Mexico's first major May Day demonstration, complete with a Haymarket commemoration. Subsequent Mexican legislation declared the holiday a “cause of pride not only for the proletariat of the United States but of the whole world.” In 1921, the Irish-born, Chicago-based veteran labor organizer Mary “Mother” Jones was on a labor delegation in Mexico City and bore witness to this solidarity. Jones was shocked to see Mexican workers enter the hall carrying the Mexican flag alongside a banner dedicated to *Los Martiers de Chicago*. Said Jones, the honor that workers gave to Haymarket was “the most remarkable demonstration I had witnessed in all my years in industrial conflict.” To this day, May Day in Mexico is celebrated as the “Day of the Martyrs of Chicago.” From their harvest in Yucatán to the hanging of the Haymarket organizers and back, ropes interlinked the brutal circuits of capital and empire, as well as the swell of international resistance rising against them.¹⁴

In the tumultuous first decades of the twentieth century, ropes were often curious composites of coexisting global regimes of accumulation, including manila from the US imperial control over the Philippines, cotton or domestically produced hemp from brutal Jim Crow sharecropping regimes, and henequen produced through the violent exploitation of expropriated Indigenous peasants and an indebted and dispossessed global proletariat. A further understanding of the financing, property regimes, policing, and relations of social reproduction, along with the transport, storage, distribution, consumption, and destruction of this raw material would reveal a vast interlocking universe of exploitation, expropriation, and oppression. Ropes, the

ligatures of the global economy, materialize the processes by which the lives of people across disparate spaces are densely interwoven. A social history of ropes demonstrates that when capitalism links spaces it also links the fates of the people compelled into its regimes of accumulation.

As historian Peter Linebaugh writes in his landmark study of crime in eighteenth-century London, the social history of hanging “must also be an economic history of the trades and working conditions of its victims.”¹⁵ Accordingly, a full accounting of the forces that set value in motion requires a global geographic analysis of capital and a social history of its antagonists. Ropes, through such a socio-spatial and economic history, can illuminate the movement of capital, commodities, and labor, as well as the bonds shared by Yucatecan peasants, Chicago labor organizers, dispossessed Native people, victims of Jim Crow terror, and others who might otherwise be untraceable within discretely imagined national, racial, ethnic, or labor histories. Unbraiding the strands of the accumulation process exposes obscured histories of solidarity and evinces possible futures of shared struggle. Ropes, in other words, help demonstrate how capital, geography, and histories of opposition converge. They illustrate how people have been concretely conjoined across space and how they have consequently understood their fates as interlinked within a global class struggle.

While ropes are not the subject of this book, they serve to illustrate its stakes and scope. Ropes also illustrate the book’s key challenge: to render vivid the relationships between space, imaginaries, the color line, and the global class struggle. The rope, for example, that lynched Mexican rancher Antonio Rodríguez in Rock Springs, Texas, on November 3, 1910, was tied to global regimes of butchery and wider currents of resistance. The rope that bound Rodríguez to a mesquite tree, that prevented his escape as he was covered with dry branches and doused with gasoline, that trussed him as he was burned alive before a gaping mob of thousands, this rope—a tool of the man’s trade—became an instrument of despotic power. Rodríguez was accused of killing his boss’s wife, Effie Henderson. The charge came from the boss himself, a man with an established record of violence against the woman. Like Squire Taylor, George Johnson, Charles Davis, and many others before him, Rodríguez was kidnapped from his jail cell by a mob of white vigilantes intent on exacting their own justice. Without trial or due process, Rodríguez was set on fire beneath an endless Texas sky.¹⁶

A flurry of US newspapers vindicated Rodríguez’s killers, hailing a common defense of lynching: the protection of white womanhood. Lynchings were not merely forms of racist terror but, as Ida B. Wells argued, they were

also bloody rituals of aspirational authority.¹⁷ Lynchings symbolically affirmed an order wherein white men were, by law, the dominant owners, heirs, and sellers of property and capital, whether or not they actually possessed property or capital themselves. This order manifested at regional, national, and international levels. The killing of Rodríguez, a Mexican foreign national, constituted a brazen flouting of international law. Less than one hundred miles from the US–Mexico border, his murder represented a totality of racist terror, state power, and socio-spatial control codified through notions of gender, class, nationality, and race. The rope that killed Antonio Rodríguez was, in other words, a color line.¹⁸

But the same rope also twined together measures of international outrage. Demonstrators defended Rodríguez across the United States and in Mexico and Cuba. Enraged leaders called for boycotts of US goods. Protestors rallied at the offices of US newspapers and businesses in Mexico, at the US ambassador's home, and in the streets, often under fire from Mexican troops. On November 12, Mexican Revolutionary leader Ricardo Flores Magón described the “explosion of indignation” rocking Mexican cities. In *Regeneración*, his internationally circulating newspaper, he relayed protesters' condemnation of the murder and of the systemic violence perpetrated against Mexicans in the United States. For Flores Magón, this violence was in keeping with the avaricious behavior of US capitalists. It was racism that had killed Rodríguez and, as he described, “capitalism foment racial hatred.” On November 20, 1910, the Mexican Revolution officially broke out. During this first major social revolution of the twentieth century, the economic geography of the lynch rope would unravel, and the politics of the color line would throb at the heart of the global class struggle.¹⁹

THE COLOR LINE

Quemaron vivo á un hombre. ¿Donde? En la nación modelo, en la tierra de la libertad, en el hogar de los bravos, en el pedazo de suelo que todavía no sale de la sombra proyectada por la horca de John Brown. (“They burned a man alive. Where? In that model nation, the land of the free, home of the brave, on the same piece of land that has still not escaped the shadow cast by the hanging of John Brown.”)

PRÁXEDIS G. GUERRERO,

“Blancos, Blancos,” *Regeneración*, November 19, 1910

The notion of a “color line” colloquially refers to an easily identifiable, observable, and knowable line demarcating racial difference. In its most common usage, the term seems to require no explanation, an idiom seemingly interchangeable with racism—itsself a phenomenon that assumes shared definitions even as it is experienced and comprehended with enormous variation. If race was constituted through clearly fixed and shared definitions, it would not require such persistent explanation or such constant and violent redefinition of its boundaries.

The anachronistic terminology of “color” can be misleading for modern-day scholars since it seems to refer to fixed and observable differences in skin. In one of the earliest usages of the term, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, in his 1881 essay “The Color Line,” described color itself as being “innocent” but clarified that it was the “things with which it is coupled [that] make it hated.” In Douglass’s definition, the color line is unstable and uneven, “neither uniform in its operations nor consistent in its principles.” While he devoted much of the essay to a discussion of anti-Black racism at the heart of US slavery, he described the color line as expansive, linking slavery to Indigenous land theft and genocide, violence against Asian immigrants, and military aggression against Mexico. He described the logic employed by Scottish settlers in California in their lynching of Chinese workers. When the settlers were asked to account for their actions, Douglass wrote, “their answer is that a Chinaman is so industrious he will do all the work, and can live by wages upon which other people would starve.” This expression of economic self-interest as a justification for homicide represented for Douglass the “inconsistencies of the color-line feeling.”²⁰

The “color line” is more commonly attributed to W. E. B. Du Bois, who popularized the term in his many writings. His definition of the color line—in keeping with Douglass’s—also repudiated any fixed meaning. Analyzing the global situation, Du Bois perceived the color line as a set of logics and spatial practices at work, an ascendant way of thinking that naturalized intensely destructive global processes of exploitation, expropriation, and extermination. His prediction that “the problem of the twentieth century” would be “the problem of the color line” became the core of his materialist analysis of emergent US political, economic, military, and cultural power. In this, he was remarkably prescient.²¹

In his early writings, Du Bois located the operation of the US color line in common practices of meaning-making that defined national exteriority. In reviewing the popular foundational myths of the nation, he examined how the practice of “murdering Indians” was depicted as advancing US civiliza-

tion. He noted how so-called American heroes were celebrated relative to their violent humiliation of Mexicans during the US-Mexican War. He detailed how the enslavement of Africans, a transparent contradiction to US democratic principles of freedom and liberty, was continually resolved by the reassertion of Black inhumanity. More generally, he saw how freedom under the color line was predicated on the idea that “another people should not be free.” While enshrined in popular culture and historical mythmaking, Du Bois recognized that these characteristics found “secure foothold” in the policies and philosophies of the state. When the state was defined against that which was deemed external, chaotic, unruly, and violent, its very legitimacy depended upon continual maintenance of a racist order.²²

While the metaphor of a color line connotes a physical demarcation, a solid boundary across which difference is maintained, Du Bois deftly identified its constant fluctuations. Taking a historical view, he charted the color line’s evolution as both a logic and a practice, finding spatial expression in the movement of capital. Through the color line, uneven socio-spatial relations were organized according to purported racial differences and construed as natural. Race did not exist prior to such spatial ordering; it was the outcome rather than the referent of the color line. Racial regimes, which Cedric Robinson describes as constructed social systems wherein race is proposed as a justification for existing power relations, are ceaselessly in need of repair. The violence that accompanies them is directly related to their fragility and utter instability. Rather than a fixed border, the color line names the processes by which racial regimes attain legibility through space.²³

While continually reasserted through tremendous violence, racial regimes, notes Robinson, are “unrelentingly hostile to their exhibition.”²⁴ This was particularly true of the racial regimes that produced the aspirational identities of whiteness. At the turn of the twentieth century, the shadows of the Klansmen’s hoods concealed the identities of perpetrators from the victims of racist terror. They also concealed the unrequited ambitions of the small men who participated in racist vigilante violence. Owning modest means and meager assets, the “middling” men in lynch mobs could briefly associate with the landed interests and social powers they did not possess.²⁵ Wrought through such violence was an imagined leveling, a fleeting sense of shared purpose, power, and racial identity with men more influential than themselves. Whether hiding behind masks or “at no times disguised,” lynchers moved vainly in the incongruous shadows of power.²⁶ “We looked at him clearly, with world-old eyes,” wrote Du Bois, “and saw simply a human thing, weak and pitiable and cruel.”²⁷

Writing about Mexico in 1914, shortly after the US invasion of Veracruz, Du Bois named the global dimensions of these racist projections. “We have Cuba by the industrial throat and the Philippines on its knees, albeit squirming,” he wrote. “Why not Mexico with its millions of brown peons?” Du Bois here impersonated the sneering mentality of US capitalists, imagining the “darker” world as an endless site of investments and its people as the means of accumulation, all for the taking. In doing so, he also emulated the fraudulent swagger of these middling men who believed themselves to be the superiors of Black people, Italians, Chinese, Japanese, and “mongrels” in the United States, all those deemed to be “easy to whip and keep whipped.” From the perch of this purported superiority, Du Bois describes an imagined entitlement to the spoils of foreign interventions: the belief that the “comfortable stream of dividends flowing into white pockets” belonged somehow to all men who identified as white, regardless of their class or actual means. Du Bois expanded on these insights within the year with a fascinating article for the *Atlantic* magazine entitled “The African Roots of War.” There he extended the damning portrait of these pitiable people, owning little but their illusions of power, believing that their fates were not only tethered to the success of capitalist imperialism but that they were one and the same.²⁸

“The African Roots of War” links these subjectivities to broader political-economic transformations. Du Bois narrated how a nascent bourgeoisie had revolted against their exclusions from the wealth of colonial empires in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. “Slowly,” he wrote, “the divine right of the few to determine economic income and distribute the goods and services of the world has been questioned and curtailed.” As the global capitalist system massively expanded in the late nineteenth century, he described the emergence of a “democratic despotism.” Under this system, Western nations pursuing imperial expansions sought to harmonize the interests of capital and labor. Once the antagonist of industrial capital, the “white workingman” was newly “asked to share the spoil[s]” of imperial gain. Cleverly deploying the day’s popular language of finance, Du Bois described how the “‘Color Line’ began to pay dividends.” Aspiring classes were duly convinced they were the direct beneficiaries or “small shareholders” of the New Imperialism. Those deemed “white” in Western Europe and in North America were constructed in the dominant imaginary as racially superior to the “dark” world, and further convinced that they were princelings of this new system. In this seemingly democratized form of imperialism, “captains of industry” emulated kings, aspiring workers fancied themselves global investors, and a new cycle of

accumulation emerged in the shell of the old. As subordinate groups in Western nations became convinced that the imperial interests of capitalists were their own, a new mode of global economic leadership began to emerge. The color line thereby named the spatial imaginary of the New Imperialism.²⁹

SHADOW HEGEMONY

Du Bois's commentary on Mexico, as well as his essay "The African Roots of War," offered remarkable if underappreciated assessments of space and subjectivity relative to specific phases of capitalist development. His analysis of capitalism and imperialism anticipated the publication of Lenin's analysis by almost two years.³⁰ His ability to characterize the phase of capitalist accumulation coming into being in the late nineteenth century also foretold analyses of modern-day political economists. "The imperial width of the thing," as he described it, "the heaven-defying audacity—makes its modern newness."³¹ The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of a distinct form of geoeconomic power, what Du Bois called the "New Imperialism" and what Giovanni Arrighi has described as the "systemic cycle of accumulation" under US hegemony.³²

This mid-nineteenth- to early twentieth-century period marks a critical overlap between what Arrighi theorizes as the waning of British hegemony (of the late eighteenth through early twentieth centuries) and the emergence of US hegemony (from the late nineteenth century to the present). In this period of transition, the era of the New Imperialism, nation states not only pursued expansion through overt and formalized territorial seizure, but also through the more insidious mechanisms of financial control, debt regimes, and threatened militarism. Rather than simply installing a foreign government or practicing direct administration in countries where states sought land, labor, raw materials, or strategic geopolitical locations, investors exerted dramatic financial control over sites of investment and subsequently insured these investments with the threat or actuality of military intervention. These developments took shape, no doubt, through the accretion and ongoing processes of colonial territorial seizure. While territorialism and capitalism "cross-fertilized" one another throughout the reign of the British Empire, in the emergent US model of hegemony, they were, as Arrighi notes, "indistinguishable."³³ In the reorganization of the expanding global economy, US forces gradually developed the capacities to dictate the terms through which

capital was administered, governed, managed, and dispensed on a global scale. US hegemony was refined in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the deepest and most devastating advances initially made in Mexico.³⁴

While the Mexican Revolution is often understood as a contained nationalist event, the allied struggle of the Mexican peasantry and working class was largely mobilized against dramatic transformations of property ownership, state power, governance, and social structures wrought by the ascendant influence of foreign capital in the political economy. Within these transformations, the United States occupied an increasingly decisive role. By the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the US capitalist class owned more than 22 percent of Mexico's surface, accounting for nearly a quarter of all US investment and exceeding the total holdings of Mexican entities. Conglomerates like the International Banking Corporation, the first American multinational bank, emerged in Mexico in 1902, facilitating US investments in Mexican government bonds, mining, oil, agriculture, and other industries. These profits further capitalized ventures in China, India, Panama, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic, a capitalist infrastructure later formalized and fortified by US state policy. The relationship of the United States to Mexico would therefore play a major part in the emergence of US hegemony during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because the Mexican Revolution threatened specific material investments as well as the propertied logic of the period, it challenged growing US hegemony within the model of the New Imperialism. It was therefore a prime site within which the shifting logics of capital, labor, property, imperialism, and revolution could be thought anew. Indeed, as this book observes, from the vantage point of the Mexican Revolution, the internationalization of capital in the period helped to produce a decidedly internationalist consciousness.³⁵

The period of the New Imperialism marked a critical turning point in global hegemony as world economic leadership began a shift to the United States, albeit under the long shadow of the British Empire. US power grew according to nearly every standard measure: as the world's leading industrial producer, home to the richest multinational corporations on the planet; the leading disseminator of cultural industries—particularly with the advent of film; and, for the first time in its history, as a leading exporter rather than importer of capital.³⁶ What was new was the formal consolidation of the powers, state capacities, and interests with which the United States would come to officially superintend the global capitalist economy. Following the money, so to speak, traces an alternate path of American globalized power, one that preceded the

height of US political hegemony by midcentury.³⁷ As historian Odd Arne Westad has noted, this unparalleled economic growth in the late nineteenth century made the United States an economic superpower “well before it took on that role militarily and politically.”³⁸ These developments would come to establish the form of US global power in the century to come.

US hegemony is customarily defined as a post-World War II phenomenon, often characterized by Henry Luce’s phrase the “American Century.” Perhaps the midcentury represented not the emergence of an epoch but a prelude to the apex of US power, a period when the United States as a hegemon exerted its greatest global influence. The Second World War marked a gruesome confluence of military, political, cultural, and geo-economic power when, as film scholars have observed, the dropping of the atomic bomb made humans for the first time into cameras.³⁹ The unleashing of atomic flashes in the skies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki made the cities into light boxes. As a result, the shadows of Japanese people were permanently burned into the walls and grounds where they stood. The era of the New Imperialism began in the shadow of British hegemony. It materialized in the flickering shadows of Klan hoods and reached its apex in the monstrous dematerialization of people into atomic traces. For purposes of this study, the evolution of US leadership over the global economy can be characterized by this generalized state of striving, a defensive subjectivity of becoming, a longing for power required through racist terror—an era, in other words, of *shadow hegemony*.⁴⁰

The shadow has multiple valences. It indexes how regimes of accumulation under emergent phases of US hegemony developed in relation to previous modalities of empire. Temporally, this regime emerged in the shadow of the British Empire, under its tutelage, emulating its forms of development and aspiring to its hegemonic position. Spatially and procedurally, it was grounded in the structures, logics, laws, social organization, and administrative infrastructures developed under colonial rule. The system entered into crisis once it began to cast its own hegemonic shadows.⁴¹

This book is also the story of other shadows. It considers how interpretations of internationalism were conditioned by shifts in the political geographies of global capital accumulation. It contends that overlooked forms of internationalism arose out of and as a response to the particular modalities of geo-economic power emergent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the shadows, it observes, people congregated, commiserated, struggled, and sometimes collectively decided that conditions could be otherwise. In his novel of radical internationalist organizing during the Mexican

Revolution, Paco Ignacio Taibo II describes this as the *Shadow of the Shadow*.⁴² As this book seeks to show, *shadow hegemony* often unwittingly provided cover for its own undoing.⁴³

Arise! follows the internationalization of US capital in the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries and traces the concurrent efforts of global radicals to produce an internationalist consciousness. It draws on Douglass and Du Bois to theorize struggles over the production of space and the territoriality of power in the early twentieth century. It traces the paths of figures from different radical traditions like Mexican revolutionary leader Ricardo Flores Magón, Southern California-based communist organizer Dorothy Healey, radical feminist and Soviet ambassador to Mexico Alexandra Kollontai, and African American artist and organizer Elizabeth Catlett, as well as many lesser-known migrant workers who traveled to Mexico and to the United States, as they converged in unanticipated spaces and struggles. It considers how they theorized, dramatized, and challenged racist and gendered social relations of capital in this era of shadow hegemony and consequently developed new articulations of struggle. It observes how revolutionary thinkers were uniquely positioned to understand how capital crossed national borders and exploited workers and peasants—linking the destinies of those it dispossessed. Following their lead, it foregrounds the influence of the Mexican Revolution, the first major social revolution of the twentieth century.⁴⁴

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

The ascendancy of shadow hegemony was coterminous with the rise of Porfirio Díaz as the president of Mexico, first elected in 1876. For seven terms and over thirty-four years he ruled the country until he was overthrown in 1910 at the outset of the Mexican Revolution. The Porfiriato, the period of his reign, marked an era of relative stability after nearly a half century of volatility following Mexico's independence from Spain. President Díaz bridged an era of Liberal reform to the era of New Imperialism. In the period preceding his reign, Liberals, led by Mexican president Benito Juárez, had wrested power from conservative colonial vestiges and French foreign occupiers. Díaz himself had been a military hero against French Intervention. Against the memories of Spanish as well as US, British, and French colonial invasions, he gained legitimacy in developing the modern Mexican state. The Porfiriato, the decisive though

contested period of economic, social, and political development, ultimately set the stage for revolution.⁴⁵

Through Díaz's stewardship, Mexico underwent a violent process of modernization and integration into the world market, the benefits of which were unevenly distributed across the country. Modernization expanded the resources of the federal government and created extensive public infrastructure in railroads, roads, and pipelines, just as it had in other Latin American countries. This refashioning facilitated the cultivation, transport, and export of raw materials and induced massive imports of foreign capital. Accordingly, the federal government centralized state and class power, often wresting funds, rights, and control of local state entities to become the major broker between foreign finance, industrial capital, and Mexican land, labor, and industry. Among the resulting socio-spatial transformations were staggering expropriations of commonly held Indigenous *ejido* lands by the state for commercial agriculture. Some Indigenous populations, hitherto existing somewhat beyond the jurisdiction of the Mexican state, found themselves in violent confrontation with *rurales*—rural police forces—opposing their autonomy. While an emerging bourgeoisie attempted to keep pace with these developments and largely supported Díaz, the peasantry, constituting over 75 percent of the population, experienced violent dispossession, criminalization, and persecution. A newly proletarianized workforce further bore the brunt of exploitation in massively expanding industries. A frustrated middle class saw national resources, industries, and state functions expand with foreign investments, processes for which they were taxed but within which they were politically unrepresented. Given stagnant political formations, they were unable to voice their expanding grievances and vote Díaz out. Splits began to emerge among elite factions and their international supporters. To handle the multiple contradictions, the Díaz regime expanded its repressive measures, often by embedding them in new industrial and state infrastructure. Railroads, for example, spread with dramatic promises of travel and expanded trade, all the while ferrying soldiers in greater numbers, at greater speeds, over greater swaths of the land.⁴⁶

Some scholars have disputed whether the simultaneity of regional struggles for autonomy that exploded after 1910 all clearly congealed in one singular Mexican Revolution. Indeed, the landless peasants who followed Emiliano Zapata in uprisings throughout the south-central part of the country were distinct from struggles in the Northwest and Southeast by insurgent Indigenous Yaqui and Maya Indians against the state's colonial violence. These in turn were connected to but often at odds with struggles for land and against

local oligarchy united in the North under Pancho Villa. Political struggles for representation emerged in new middle-class oppositional formations and among factions of the elite. Support amassed for wealthy landowners like Francisco Madero, who initially displaced Díaz as president. Former Díaz loyalists split into their own political and military factions. Radical anarcho-syndicalists in the Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party or PLM) led by Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón organized across the US–Mexico border in concert with newly proletarianized fractions of the country. The violent repression of PLM-affiliated strikes by mineworkers in Cananea, Sonora, in 1906 and by textile workers in Río Blanco, Veracruz, in 1907 became flashpoints in the lead-up to Revolution. Further, the PLM moved across the border, where Mexican workers struggled with fellow miners in the Southwest United States, and with many worldwide who sympathized with the Revolution.⁴⁷ That these and other variegated struggles did not conform to any one political agenda does not negate the seismic rupture of the Mexican Revolution. As this book argues, the Mexican Revolution, the first major revolutionary conflagration of the twentieth century, produced conditions within which internationalist challenges to the New Imperialism arose.⁴⁸

The book moves through the history of the Mexican Revolution into its afterlife (or, as some have argued, its culmination) in the 1940s to demonstrate the influence of the Revolution and the global visions it helped produce. It does not rehearse arguments that the United States played *the* determinate role in fomenting conditions of revolutionary revolt. Historians of the Revolution have situated US investments among many international forces exerting financial, political, and diplomatic pressure.⁴⁹ Scholars have also carefully excavated the roles of US capitalists in Mexico and drawn important connections between the expansion of US hegemony and investments and political influence in Mexico.⁵⁰ These texts have enlivened discussions of the history of capitalism and social history from the often overlooked vantage point of Latin America.⁵¹ In drawing upon these texts, *Arise!* also seeks to contribute to scholarship uncovering streams of internationalism in the era of the Mexican Revolution.⁵²

CONVERGENCE SPACES

The challenge for organizers and theorists has long been to understand the conjoined but distinct forms of oppression under capitalism, and crucially, the ways in which struggles between them have been linked. In other words,

the process of uniting people in shared struggle across spaces of difference is certainly not as straightforward as expecting the workers of the world to unite. Relating exploited industrial Western workers to expropriated Indigenous people of the Americas; African people dispossessed of their lands, enslaved within plantocracies, and later subjugated under Jim Crow; colonial subjects concentrated in space and brutally conscripted into extractive economies; and people subjected to military occupation and imperial rule—and the convergences between them—requires some theoretical elaboration. This book offers a framework to broaden the way the revolutionary subjects of history are recognized and also expand the ways capital itself is understood and contested.⁵³

In doing so, the book seeks to avoid the narrowing tendencies in the historiography of so-called “American” radicalism, namely, to delink and make discrete different struggles as singularly national, sectoral, ethnic or racially bound. Such particularizing might lend itself to clear exposition, but at the cost of understating the astounding ways class struggles have been understood and collectively fought out by people on the move. Such tendencies circumscribe the nature of struggle and underestimate its extraordinary fluidity, ingenuity, and creativity. This book seeks instead to describe how differently situated people were often thrown together in unexpected ways, and how, in those tumultuous convergences, they fought, made new meaning, and took overt and sometimes subtle inspiration from one another, establishing a more dynamic history of struggle that can enliven our sense of the reach, scope, sites, and stakes of early twentieth-century revolutionary actions and ideas.⁵⁴

These goals set up multiple quandaries: How can mutable and overlapping processes of exploitation, expropriation, and oppression be understood within spatial struggles? How can an overarching struggle be articulated without simplifying, flattening, or rendering equivalent different forms of systemic violence? How can contestations over capital and the territoriality of power be represented without relying on reified notions of states, races, or class struggle in the process? How can the class struggle be represented across geographic space and at different scales while attending to the gendered relations of property and power? The interventions of this book are therefore theoretical and methodological.

Arise! offers a social and spatial history of class struggle. It observes how capital produces its own negations, at a variety of spatial scales, often through unanticipated alliances. It traces various stages throughout the accumulation

process to examine how the international movement of capital has produced radical spaces of opposition. The key concept for thinking through various coterminous struggles introduced here is *convergence space*, which refers to contradictory socio-spatial sites wherein people from different backgrounds and different radical traditions have been forced together and have subsequently produced new articulations of struggle. The concept enables broad global movements of capital, repression, opposition, and ideas to be briefly stilled and their dynamics observed. Rather than flattening difference across spaces and struggles, this method seeks to examine the intersections of categories in motion.⁵⁵

This project traces a wide range of characters and convergence spaces. It considers Mexican revolutionaries and global radicals in Mexico alongside workers, cultural figures, and soldiers. It also transcends the physical space of Mexico to consider the imaginaries projected onto revolutionary Mexico that extended beyond the country's borders. It focuses on art centers in Mexico City and New York City, farmworker strikes along the US–Mexico border, the Soviet embassy in Mexico City, mobilizations by the Los Angeles Unemployed Councils, and internationalist movements inside Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary in Kansas. Aligning social history and critical geography, the open-ended concept of convergence spaces captures how organizing work and spatial imaginaries were involved in the making of an internationalist consciousness in the early twentieth century.

This book examines a range of sources: memoirs, oral histories, personal correspondence, radical publications, jailhouse newspapers, prison records, private book collections, and lithographic prints, culled from national and international archives, as well as unofficial collections circulated by social movements. In the traditions of social history, anti-racist geography, and feminist political economy that emphasize people's collective struggles in insurgent place-making, each chapter considers the revolutionary process of the making of a different convergence space.

MAKING INTERNATIONALISM

Internationalism recognizes how people have been unevenly waylaid by the development of capitalism across space and developed forms of revolutionary solidarity in spite of social and spatial divisions, including national borders. It has historically reflected distinct spatial imaginaries of the world system.

Accordingly, its interpretations have been varied. Its most readily accessible history is organizational. Through such a lens, entities such as the First International (1864), Second International (1889), and Third International (1919) can offer concise illustrations of the ambitious webbing through which global labor, anarchist, socialist, and communist movements attempted to forge links over space and across movements. Similarly, institutional studies of liberal internationalism, covering entities like the League of Nations or the Geneva Convention, can offer discrete and observable histories of how humanitarian ideals became codified through international law. *Arise!* argues that while conceptions of internationalism have certainly been informed by these entities and are significantly recovered through their histories, something significant is lost to heuristics when this history is presented as merely reducible to or delimited by these organizations.

This book is concerned with the rich archive that emerges from the excess, the imagination and practice of internationalism by figures often left out of many organizational histories. It argues that their visions, activities, and aspirations offer an important source through which the broader histories of internationalism can and should be assessed. These include workers and radicals from the Global South such as Ricardo Flores Magón, whose insights root the political-economic arguments. It also considers key figures of radical traditions who traversed these institutions but could not be fully situated within them, like W. E. B. Du Bois, whose analysis of the New Imperialism and the color line grounds the study and the political-economic overview of the first chapter. Chapters highlight convergences of figures who made extraordinary experiments of internationalism in the spaces in which they found themselves and with the resources available to them. The second chapter highlights how radicals like M. N. Roy came to internationalism in revolutionary Mexico, while others, like John Reed, confronted the logic of the New Imperialism as a major fetter to its development. Within the walls of Leavenworth Penitentiary, as chapter 3 demonstrates, global radicals like Ricardo Flores Magón and working-class soldiers of empire found creative ways to teach and learn from each other about the meaning of revolution and the practice of internationalism. Chapter 4 considers how feminists radically reimagined gender, sexuality, and the organization of the family in their conceptions of the state and revolution through the lens of Alexandra Kollontai's travels in Mexico City. Chapter 5 examines how Mexican farmworkers and their families in rural California towns were connected to urban organizing efforts, largely led by women like Dorothy Healey, as they

struggled against starvation, unemployment, and eviction in cities like Los Angeles. Chapter 6 centers the material realities and dream worlds of Black domestic workers in global Harlem and traces how, through the artist Elizabeth Catlett, their visions aligned with the revolutionary legacy of the Mexican Revolution. As the conclusion argues, these expansive conceptualizations of internationalism still have much to teach us at present.

A final word: In his study of the Guyanese working people, Walter Rodney encouraged readers to consider convergences as spaces of fragmentation. His work is attendant to the ways that “cultural convergence(s)” were inadequate on their own to “contribute decisively to solidarity among the working people.” At the same time, he noted that class consciousness could not alone overcome “barriers created by legal distinctions, racial exclusiveness, and the separate trajectories of . . . culture.”⁵⁶ Following this standpoint of irresolution, this study does not impute an unreasonable faith in convergences that did not congeal. But had they been allowed to develop, this study asks what different times we might be living in.