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Social Justice Feminism and its Counter-Hegemonic Response to *Laissez-Faire* Industrial Capitalism and Patriarchy in the United States, 1899-1940

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ABSTRACT *This article uses the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic framework of Italian scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci to explain how a movement known as social justice feminism emerged as a counter-hegemonic response to two hegemonic concepts established in and continued, respectively, the post-Civil War United States:* laissez-faire *industrial capitalism and patriarchal dominance. In four stages from 1899 through 1940, social justice feminists pursued the promotion of an "entering wedge" labor legislation strategy and the increasing participation of women in national politics, particularly in the Democratic Party. While substantially successful in its goals, social justice feminism failed in two important aspects: its inability to work independently of a patriarchal political system, and, most significant, its apparent refusal to include women of color.*

KEYWORDS Social justice feminism; Antonio Gramsci; hegemony & counter-hegemony; historical sociology; feminist agency

Introduction

Words constitute so natural a part of our everyday discourse that some can become devalued through overuse. Such is the case with "hegemony." Originally derived from the Greek ήγεμονία *hegemonia*, meaning "leadership" and "rule" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015), the mass media constantly uses the word to express either the continuing superpower dominance of the United States or the rising power of the People's Republic of China.[1] Yet

[1] For examples of the long-term use of "hegemony" in its overall terms of "great power" definition, see Kelly (2014), and Hayes (1988).

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"hegemony" encompasses a deeper meaning than just a ready moniker for global or regional domination.

One of the persons who helped ground the word in multifarious meanings died after being released from a fetid Italian Fascist prison in 1937. Antonio Gramsci's posthumously published publications have become extremely influential, particularly in his discussion of cultural hegemony and its ramifications in advanced capitalist societies. Gramsci argued that the conceptualization and implementation of ideas in social discourse help to create either new inclinations or disinclinations among common populaces. His most important concern lay in how societal elites may establish cultural hegemonies that both placate non-ruling classes and simply reinforce existing economic orders. In response, Gramsci advocated for the formulation of a set of political and cultural ideas, or "counter-hegemony," from the non-elite classes, that would eventually establish a Marxian, classless society (Adamson, 1983; Gramsci, 1971, 1987, 2007).

Using Gramsci's work as a framing device, this article argues that social justice feminism acted as a counter-hegemonic movement from 1899 through 1940 against two dominant strands in the United States' cultural hegemony after the Civil War: *laissez-faire* industrial capitalism and patriarchal dominance.[2] Social justice feminists used a strategy of promoting and passing women's labor legislation as an "entering wedge" for the eventual inclusion of all workers under state protection, and strengthening of women's political participation.

This counter-hegemonic movement, moreover, went through four stages from its creation to its final efforts in the late 1930s. In the first two stages, which lasted from roughly 1899 through 1918, social justice feminists defended the constitutionality of gender-specific labor laws in court litigation and created an alliance with New York's Factory Investigating Commission (FIC) to promote and pass the most extensive labor legislation agenda in the United States until the New Deal. In the third stage, which lasted from 1918 through 1933, the second counterhegemonic aim took precedence as further attempts at a gender-specific labor legislation agenda encountered limited success and the NCL legal network disbanded solved after the U.S. Supreme Court declared women's minimum wage legislation unconstitutional. Thus, from 1921 through 1928 Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary Williams (Molly) Dewson created a new partnership between social justice feminists and the New York State Democratic party. In the final, most important, stage, which occurred from 1933 through 1940, the movement encountered its greatest successes, ranging from the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938, the United States" first maximum hours, minimum wages law, and the rise of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Yet social justice feminism still failed to become a true counter-

[2] The term "social justice feminism" comes from Sklar, Schuler & Strasser (1998). For an extension of the term into contexts other than historicism, see Kaslem & Williams (2010).

hegemonic movement because it failed to both work independently of the patriarchal establishment and to include women of color.

This article does not assume to be a groundbreaking Gramscian analysis in terms of gender; over the past three decades feminist scholars have successfully reinterpreted and extended the Italian scholar's insights into such germane issues as paid work, sexuality, and violence (see e.g., Ledwith, 2009; Kenway, 2002). But it does intend to make a fresh contribution to the field of historical sociology (Lachmann, 2013; Skocpol, 1984, p. ix), and most importantly, it also emphasizes the pertinence of Gramsci to the current global social and political situation. The once-dominant doctrine of neoliberalism, which focused on capitalistic markets and private property rights, sustained a significant decline after the severe economic effects of the Great Recession of 2007-2010 (Synamon, Fazzari & Setterfield, 2013; Domenic & Levy, 2016). Moreover, the ensuing, growing worldwide demands for social justice are further deepened by the growing climate control crisis (see e.g., Held & Young, 2011). Gramsci's hegemonic discussions therefore can provide new theoretical and practical bases for societies seeking to meet these new demands.

Gramscian Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

While the ideas of Antonio Gramsci have been extensively used in fields ranging from sociology to feminist studies (see e.g., Letherby, 2003), with nearly 400 academic papers based on his work in the last quarter of the 20th century (Van der Pijl, 2003, pp. 508-509), a full elucidation of his theoretical framework is necessary before using it in a historical context.

What Gramsci proposed, within the Marxist ideological structure of rebellion and ultimate triumph against advanced capitalistic societies, was a polymorphous approach which saw the complex interplay of everyday living and discourse as something more than economic determinism. In the straightforward Marxist methodology, economic developments totally initiate historical inclinations, especially in the hoped-for creation of a new, classless society (Marx, 1977, 1989). While not all subsequent Marxists followed this one-dimensional approach – Vladimir Lenin, for example, looked at how capitalism affected noneconomic areas such as culture and jurisprudence (Lenin 1960a, 1960b) – Gramsci, in the words of one commentator, used a "larger contextual process that managed to break with more rigid formulations of Marxism" (Harootunian, 2015, p. 115) by examining how ideas and their subsequent societal influences help create new predispositions, or lack of predispositions, among the common populace.

Part of Gramsci's formulation concerned the very fluidity of ordinary cultural discourse, which he saw not as a rigid system of class-restricted beliefs, but as an amorphous, uncertain process constructed from a three-layered interaction: the "spontaneous philosophy" of individuals, which

encompassed language, conventional wisdom, empirical knowledge, and folklore; the "world views" of societal groups united by cultural and economic solidarities, and most important, the "dominant hegemonic view" of the ruling class (Gramsci, 1971, p. 323). In order to maintain long-term societal stability, Gramsci argued, a capitalist ruling class cannot frequently use violent coercion as a means of consensus; instead, the elite must convince the other, "subaltern" classes of the inherent validity of the system's values and norms. Thus dominant cultural hegemony relies on voluntarism, participation, and the apparent "common sense" that guides the society's everyday understanding of the world, and relies on institutions such as schools and churches to disseminate the apparent traditions (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333; Gramsci, 1996, p. 91). But the ruling class's constant need to justify its cultural hegemony therefore allows room for the development of counter-hegemonies (Gramsci, 1971, p. 323; Adamson, 1983, pp. 170-179, 174; Simon, 1982, pp. 58-79; Bates, 1975, pp. 353-357).

Gramsci labelled the continual battle between the prevailing cultural hegemony and counter-hegemonic views in a society a continual "war of position," in which the subaltern classes would need to formulate political and cultural ideas to overcome the prevailing common cultural consciousness. Such counter-hegemonic forces, moreover, would encompass two agents: "class forces" which confront the processes of capitalist accumulation, and "popular democratic currents," which encompass movements or identities involved in civil society (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328; Gramsci, 1992, p. 169; Urry, 1981; Femia, 1975, p. 34). Gramsci did not see the war for position as an easily won conflict; instead, as the scholar Lawrence Freedman elegantly analogizes, "[t]he ruling classes" intellectual domination of civil society could be understood as a series of trenches and fortresses that could only be undermined by a relentless war" (Freedman, 2015, p. 331), a conflict that would need the enlistment of the "elementary passions of the people" (Gramsci, 1987, p. 418; see also Reed, 2012; Aronowitz, 2009).

Gramsci knew only too well the costs inherent in such a counter-hegemonic conflict, for he vainly tried in the mid-1920s to unite the Italian workers and peasants into an effective counter-hegemonic coalition that could overturn Italian capitalism (Gramsci, 1993, pp. 20-43; Harootunian, 2015, pp. 115-120). As will be seen in the following pages, counterhegemonic efforts to counter advanced capitalistic systems in other countries also encountered difficult obstacles, even in the midst of economic dislocations that seemingly showed serious flaws in the prevalent hegemony.

Cultural Hegemony in the Post-Civil War United States, 1865-1899

Human history often concentrates on the violent upsurges that constitute revolutions against the established political order. But non-violent societal transformations can be equally significant. Like the Information Revolution

which firmly established a postindustrial world after the late 1970s, the Second Industrial Revolution, which most scholars mark as occurring between 1865 and 1920, produced similar effects in the United States and the rest of the Western world. The world's oldest republic found itself an urbanized, industrialized power, with new centralizations and refinements in communication and transportation (Scranton, 1997; Hounsell, 1984). A nation which encompassed ideologies of individualism and small societal structures now saw those ideologies dramatically transformed in the new industrial order (Wiebe, 1967). Part of this transformation incorporated the *laissez-faire* principles first eloquently enunciated by Adam Smith in his 1776 publication, *The Wealth of Nations*, in the cultural hegemony of the United States. The idea of Social Darwinism, or the idea incurred from Darwin's nascent theory of evolution that only the "fittest" of any species survived and applied to societal conditions, found an especially congenial base of support from the Second Industrial Revolution's beneficiaries such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, who only needed to point to their own humble origins to show how, through hard work and sacrifice, any man in the United States could rise to their status of financial scionship (Hawkins, 1997; Hofstadter, 1992)

As women's organizations in the United States encountered the ramifications of the Second Industrial Revolution, social justice arose as a concept in the ongoing quandary of reconciling industrial and technological advancements with the dignity of working people. The term's social and religious implications appealed to an American middle class firmly committed to its Victorian *bourgeoisie* ways. In addition, reformers in the late 19th century took the term "justice," which previously arose in legal contexts, and redefined it in terms of the Social Gospel so as to question social and economic inequities stemming mostly from, they believed, the cultural hegemony of *laissez-faire* economics and its corresponding rationales (McGerr, 2005; Fox & Kloppenberg, 1998; Diner, 1998; Dawley, 1991).

But even as women reformers challenged *laissez-faire* industrial capitalism, they also confronted another, formidable obstacle continued by the post-Civil War cultural hegemony in the United States: patriarchal dominance. Despite acquiring certain, limited rights such as the retention of property rights after marriage, white women in the mid-to-late 19th century confronted the paradox that, although citizens through the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights, they still could not exercise the right that most represented a citizen's exercise of his or her power – the right to vote (Cott, 2000). This bifurcated system of citizenship did not immediately deprive women of all possible social power, for as scholars such as Estelle Freedman note, women, in their "separate sphere" of civil voluntary organizations, managed to mount considerable agency in the abolitionist, temperance, and suffrage movements (Freedman, 1979). But such agency did not resolve another, equally important question – how to create effective alliances with male politicians so as to create legislative means to not only protect industrial workers, but also

to counter the prevailing cultural hegemony about state involvement in the new economic system.

Social Justice Feminism as a Counter-Hegemonic Movement, 1899-1940

By the 1890s a counter-hegemonic movement against the tenets of *laissez-faire* industrial capitalism, known as progressivism, arose in the United States. This movement, which eventually gave its name to an era occurring between 1890 and 1920, originated from a desire to re-establish order in a society still absorbing the new societal presences of urbanization and industrialization, and a general dissatisfaction with the Industrial Revolution's negative effects, such as unsafe labor conditions and noisome residential accommodations (Diner, 1998; McGerr, 2005). Social justice feminism came out of this burgeoning counter-hegemony, and its main initiator, Florence Kelley, came from an interesting mixture of ideological, cultural, and practical origins.

Born in 1859, Kelley graduated from Cornell College in 1882. Denied entry into the graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania, she subsequently traveled to Europe and enrolled at the University of Zurich. While in Switzerland, Kelley joined the burgeoning socialist movement and undertook an English translation of Friedrich Engels' *The Conditions of the Working Class in England in 1844*. Returning to the United States as the wife of an Eastern European medical student, Lazare Wischnewetzky, Kelley settled in New York City. But when Wischnewetzky turned abusive, Kelley and her children moved to Chicago in 1891, securing a new home in Jane Addams's Hull House settlement (Sklar, 1995).

Kelley soon established herself as a leading reformer in the nation's second largest city. When John Peter Altgeld became Illinois's governor in 1893, he appointed Kelley the state's factory inspector. Kelley's proudest accomplishment in her four years as a state official centered on the passage of an eight hours law for working women. But she soon discovered the limits of progressivism in the United States when in 1895 Illinois's Supreme Court declared the law unconstitutional (Sklar, 1995).

Altgeld's controversial pardon of the convicted Haymarket Square rioters cost him re-election in 1896, and Kelley lost her position. In 1899 she accepted an offer to become general secretary of the National Consumers' League (NCL), a newly created national federation of women's consumer organizations. Until 1907 Kelley coordinated the League's activities and encouraged the creation of new NCL branches throughout the United States. But a landmark case soon prompted her to enter the field of legal litigation. In *Muller v. Oregon* (1907), an Oregon bakery owner challenged the state's new hours law for women workers. Kelley and her research secretary, Josephine Goldmark, worked with famed Boston attorney Louis Brandeis to defend the statute when the case came before the U.S. Supreme Court. The team wrote what became known as the "Brandeis brief," a legal document that used not

only judicial precedents but also sociological evidence, especially industrial reports from European sources. The Supreme Court agreed with this new approach, declaring the law "reasonable." No longer could the United States' court system take comfort in the abstract realities of contractual obligation between employers and employees; instead, judges began to recognize that the messy realities of industrialism warranted serious consideration (McGuire, 2004; Woloch, 1998).

After its success in *Muller v. Oregon*, the NCL legal network next worked on passing and then defending a night work law before the New York Court of Appeals. In a rare reversal, the state's highest court in *People v. Schweinler Press* (1915) overruled its previous decision against night work legislation, conceding that the NCL and the Factory Investigating Commission had now demonstrated that overnight work proved cumbersome for working women. The legal network also continued its successful defense of labor legislation before the nation's highest court. In *Bunting v. Oregon* (1917), for example, the Supreme Court ruled that men's working hour limitations did not violate the 14th Amendment's "freedom of contract" principle, under which the employer–employee relationship could not be interfered with by the state (McGuire, 2004; Urofsky, 1992).

In addition to using the court system, social justice feminists also sought support for their counter-hegemonic aims through cross-class and cross-gender support, which reflected Gramsci's ideas of "class" and "popular democratic forces." Two leading social justice feminists demonstrated the cross-class nature of the movement. In 1926 Rose Schneiderman, a former garment worker and president of the New York Women's Trade Union League (NYWTUL), argued that the quest for social justice included "the right to be born well, the right to a carefree and happy childhood, the right to education, [and] the right to mental, spiritual, and physical growth and development." Without these rights of industrial justice, Schneiderman continued, full participation in the American political process by women would be impossible (Schneiderman, 1926). Three years later, Frances Perkins, an upper-middle-class, college educated woman, stated upon becoming New York State's Industrial Commissioner that "social justice is possible in an industrial society" (Perkins, 1929, n.p.).

In addition, when the New York state legislature created the Factory Investigating Commission after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 killed 141 workers, Kelley and the then-head of the NYWTUL, Mary Elizabeth Dreier, quickly formed alliances with Factory Investigating Commission (FIC) leaders such as Alfred E. Smith and Robert F. Wagner, Sr., who also served in important positions within the New York State legislature. From 1911 through 1915 the FIC proposed over fifty labor legislation laws that received enactment, the largest successful program of its kind before the 1930s (McGuire, 2006). These necessary cross-gender coalitions with male politicians, moreover, would inspire future social justice feminists such as

Eleanor Roosevelt to undertake the movement's second counterhegemonic aim of increasing women's direct involvement in the political process.

Social justice feminists expanded their networks to include such public administrators as Mary van Kleeck and Mary Anderson. After 1918 van Kleeck and Anderson pursued an alternative view of public administration that focused on social justice, not on the seemingly dominant "administrative orthodoxy" of efficiency and objectivity (McGuire, 2012a; McGuire, 2011). Academic figures as Sophonosiba Breckinridge at the University of Chicago also provided key motivation in sociology and social work (Costin, 2003). Thus the counter-hegemonic aims of social justice feminism received strong support from a variety of social nexuses.

But, as with national progressivism, social justice feminism's energy began to wane after 1917. The advent of the United States' involvement in World War I, and the subsequent disillusionment concerning the war's resolution and the Treaty of Versailles' rejection by the United States Senate, considerably dampened any impulse towards progressivism after 1920 (Dawley, 2003). Moreover, despite the formation of the Women's Joint Legislative Conference (WJLC), a coalition of over twenty organizations in New York State, the WJLC's attempt to continue the counter-hegemonic "entering wedge" strategy ran into the opposition of both conservative business interests and women who opposed gender-specific legislation because of their support of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. While hours and minimum wage legislation for working women eventually received passage through the New York state legislature in 1927 and 1933, respectively, these actions required long, hard years of lobbying and organizing. Most important, the NCL legal network's efforts came to a devastating halt when the U.S. Supreme Court declared women's minimum wage legislation unconstitutional in *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, 261 U.S. 525 (1923). In declaring that such a law violated the sanctity of the "freedom of contract" principle – in which no outside agency could intervene in the contractual employer-employee relationship – the United States' highest court confirmed that the traditional *laissez-faire* industrial capitalistic order remained the national hegemony, despite the previous twenty years of progressivism (McGuire, 2001, 2014).

Because of the obstacles facing the continuation of promoting and passing gender-specific legislation, social justice feminists now centered on the establishment and extension of their second goal: providing increased participation for women in the national political system. This goal became the primary aim of two new social justice feminist leaders, Eleanor Roosevelt and Dewson. From 1921 through 1928, Roosevelt worked to make the women's section of the New York State Democratic party a stronger, more effective part of the party's electoral activities, through a combination of lobbying, campaign organizing, and installing a strong network of women leaders within the party leadership. She therefore not only increased women's participation within the Democratic party, but also united social justice

feminists with party officials. Dewson, a former social activist, entered politics in 1926 at Roosevelt's behest and quickly established herself as a shrewd, hard-working political organizer. By 1932 she became the head of the women's division of the Democratic National Campaign Committee, a significant harbinger of her future national political career (McGuire, 2014; Ware, 1987).

In his discussion of hegemony and society, Gramsci discusses "organic crises," which he saw as crises where the structures and practices that constitute and reproduce a hegemonic order fall into chronic and visible disrepair, creating new political and cultural contentions and allowing for the possibility of total societal transformation (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 275-276). This organic crisis apparently occurred with the onset of the Great Depression in the United States after 1929, which, for the time being, soured many citizens on the idea of *laissez-faire* industrial capitalism (McElvaine, 1993). It also provided the best opportunity for social justice feminism to promote its counter-hegemonic aims since the end of World War I, particularly when Franklin D. Roosevelt defeated Herbert Hoover in 1932 for the presidency. Not only did Roosevelt pledge to use government actively as a force not only to combat the economic crisis, but he also promised to undertake effective reform to both ameliorate and to prevent future capitalistic cataclysms. Moreover, three important social justice feminists now assumed top positions in the new presidency: Eleanor Roosevelt, ostensibly "just" First Lady, wielded considerable unofficial power not only as the President's wife but also because of her formidable political skills; Frances Perkins received an appointment as the first female cabinet officer as United States Secretary of Labor; and Dewson eventually became the chief organizer of women for the Democratic party.

The major counter-hegemonic force for social justice feminism within the federal government eventually became the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Originally created in 1924, the Women's Division remained underfunded and headed by a part-time director for the next nine years. But by the fall of 1933 Eleanor Roosevelt and Dewson convinced both the President and the new DNC chairman, James A. Farley, to establish a permanent, sizable budget for the Women's Division and to make its directorship a full-time position. Assuming the new directorship in October 1933, Dewson spent the next three years increasing the Women's Division's power through campaign organizing, public speechmaking, and intra-divisional publications; by organizing regional conferences for members of the Women's Division and informing them of new party and governmental developments through a Reporter Plan; and, most significant, by making the Division an effective proselytizer for both the goals of social justice feminism and the New Deal (McGuire, 2004; McGuire, 2012b; McGuire, 2014).

By the mid-1930s both counter-hegemonic aims of providing an opening for the governmental protection of workers and increasing women's

participation in national politics became substantially fulfilled. In 1935 the United States Congress passed the Social Security Act, providing old-age assistance, and three years later enacted the FLSA. By 1936, moreover, the Women's Division became an effective part of the increasing Democratic political gains in the United States. In the 1934 congressional elections, the Democratic party countered usual political trends by increasing its Congressional seats, and two years later President Roosevelt received the largest-ever presidential mandate in United States history. Thus the years 1933 through 1940 represented the most successful stage of social justice feminism as a counter-hegemonic movement. It did not mean, however, that the counter-hegemony totally removed the two societal hegemonies of *laissez-faire* industrial capitalism and of a patriarchal society (McGuire, 2014).

The Failure of Social Justice Feminism as a Counter-Hegemonic Movement

Social justice feminism failed as a counter-hegemonic movement in two ways: it could not become fully independent of the prevailing cultural hegemony, particularly in its patriarchal aspects, and most important, it did not include women of color.

But one must be careful not to entirely assess blame to social justice feminists for their failure to fully divest themselves of the prevailing political hegemony. One of the central weaknesses of Gramsci's discussion of the formation of counter-hegemonic movements centers on his apparent inability to fully confront a central quandary in the war of position: how much of the prevailing political and social structures can be used in the implementation of a counterhegemonic vision? To totally divest a society of its traditional structure, especially one established over a period of 50 or more years, may be seeking to court disaster, as became clear with the attempted radicalism of the French Revolution, which destroyed the Bourbon monarchial system, but failed to replace the centuries-old system with a satisfactory alternative. The resulting chaos and disorder merely led the French back to a semi-monarchial system headed by Napoleon Bonaparte, who eventually declared himself French emperor. Gramsci evidently did not include this seemingly inherent contradiction in his work.

In social justice feminism's case, women such as Dewson and Roosevelt needed to work very carefully with the overwhelmingly patriarchal leadership of the national Democratic party. This proved especially important in upgrading the Women's Division from a weakly funded and staffed part of the DNC to a strongly funded organization headed by a full-time director. Even when Dewson became the Women's Division's full-time director, she still needed to collaborate closely with the DNC chairman (and close collaborator with President Franklin D. Roosevelt) James A. Farley from

1933 onwards. Farley recognized the importance of Democratic women to maintaining the party's national control of the political process, but he still did not refrain from sometimes condescending to Dewson. The normally feisty Massachusetts native needed to restrain her natural impatience – at least until she wrote her 1949 memoirs, which, significantly, remained unpublished among her personal papers left at the Franklin D. Roosevelt presidential library (McGuire, 2014).

Even with this natural difficulty, social justice feminism cannot totally escape blame from failing to further secure support for its counter-hegemonic vision, particularly when it came to the question of race. This does not mean that all of the movement's leaders failed to consider the issue in its full ramifications; Florence Kelley, for example, served as a board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) after the organization's creation in 1909 (Sklar, 1995). But in arguably the largest, most successful stage of social justice feminism, the central organization for such an effort – the Women's Division of the DNC – did not embrace the inclusion of all possible Democratic women voters, particularly African-American women.

The situation proved a most complicated one, for three reasons. First, as scholars have demonstrated, while African-American women did begin to realign in large numbers to the Democratic party by the mid-1930s, such new recruits did not abandon their traditionally instituted dual strategy of pragmatism and critical detachment, particularly given that the United States' oldest political party's history not only incorporated a traditionally contentious attitude towards the institution and expansion of minority rights, but also because Southern Democrats, major controllers of Congressional committees, continued to block major initiatives such as anti-lynching legislation from enactment (Materson, 2009; White, 1999, Higgenbotham, 1990).

Second, while Dewson and Eleanor Roosevelt, in particular, demonstrated no overt hostility to African-American women, the two politically pragmatic women needed to keep in mind the ever-cautious attitude of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, which feared antagonizing the formidable Southern Congressional scions into blocking major parts of the administration's New Deal agenda (McGuire, 2013). Finally, three of the Women's Division's leaders from 1933 through 1940, Harriet Elliott, Gladys Avery Tillett, and Mary Thompson Evans, came from the South, and their natural propensity therefore lay in disregarding, if not overtly rejecting, any approaches to African-American women (McGuire, 2012b). Thus, ironically, the counter-hegemonic movement of social justice feminism indirectly assisted the continuing racist hegemony in the United States by ignoring women of color.

This internal contradiction can be most clearly seen in the example of Crystal Bird Fauset. A Philadelphia native, Fauset established herself as a social and political activist in her native city during the 1920s and early 1930s, and then established a national presence through her burgeoning

friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1936, Fauset became the DNC's first director of colored women's activities at the start of that year's national political campaign. But in the next four years, Fauset became increasingly isolated in her relationships with social justice feminists in the Women's Division, and even unable to interest Eleanor Roosevelt in direct efforts to encourage black voters. After the 1940 campaign, Fauset left her directorship, and although she continued to participate in Democratic party activities for the next four years, her frustrations finally boiled over during the 1944 campaign. Finally breaking from her longtime party and her friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, Fauset announced her support for Republican presidential candidate Thomas E. Dewey in September 1944. Not only did Fauset's defection become the most significant sign of social justice feminism's counter-hegemonic failure to include women of color, but it also symbolized a continuing failure of the Democratic party to institute any true inclusion until the 1960s, when urban black women such as Shirley Chisholm and Barbara Jordan began to continue the advances undertaken by Fauset two decades previously (McGuire, 2013).

A major question that results from a consideration of social justice feminism's counterhegemonic failures is whether the movement's efforts led to what Gramsci calls in his other writings a "passive revolution," where the ruling class, confronted with the "sporadic, incoherent responsiveness of the popular masses, accedes to some part of the popular demands and thus institutes some partial amelioration or reform which it calls 'progress,' but is actually simply a pacification measure" (Gramsci, 2007, p. 3:257). What one could say is that social justice feminism helped contribute to the main point of modern-day liberalism in the United States – to provide a balance between the persistence of the old order and the emergent new forces made possible by the nation's capitalist development (Harootunian, 2015, p. 132).

In addition, one must also consider the following question: do passive revolutions, or the balancing of liberalism, defer a full consideration of systematic difficulties? (Harootunian, 2015, p. 133). As some historians have argued since the end of the New Deal, the reform efforts of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration modified, but did not entirely eliminate, the possible excesses of a capitalistic system geared primarily on profit considerations. In fact, one could argue that any attempts at modification of capitalism ended with the advent of World War II, and definitely disappeared after World War II for two reasons: the unprecedented economic expansion that occurred between roughly 1947 and 1975, and then the increasingly anti-statist policies of administrations, beginning with the highly popular rhetoric of the Ronald Reagan administration (Cohen, 2003; Chafe, 2003). Thus the seeming permanent changes of the New Deal order only modified, but did not fully replace, the hegemonic economic system that controlled, and still controls, the United States, just as the *Risorgimento* of the 1860s did not change the elitist control of Italian culture that existed before Italian

unification. But such a failure at total change did not stop contemporaneous attempts at modifying gender barriers.

Social justice feminism gradually concluded by the end of the 1930s. The advent of World War II, and the increasing likelihood of the United States' involvement, meant that a federal government already wearied of domestic reform in the late 1930s became more apathetic towards a continuation of the New Deal (McGuire, 2012b). Perhaps what we can say is that social justice feminism helped pave the way for subsequent counter-hegemonic challenges. As demonstrated by such scholars as Dorothy Sue Cobble and Landon R.Y. Storrs, labor union and federal government feminists continued the fight initiated by social justice feminism, expanding the aims to include such things as equal pay and day care for the children of working mothers (Cobble, 2005, 2014). In addition, the activism demonstrated by social justice feminists, particularly in forming new centers of political power within the national Democratic party, helped prompt the formation of feminist organizations such as the National Organization for Women in the 1960s (Collins, 2009). Thus while counter-hegemonic movements do not always succeed in their immediate time period, long-term success can come through their slow yet sure infiltration of the always-fluid social, cultural, and political forces contained in the always-fluid cultural hegemony.

Conclusion

Karl Marx's explanation of the importance of economics in considering historical context still remains pertinent today. Yet one must hesitate before accepting economic causes as the sole factors spurring on the course of present events eventually historicized into societal memories. Reality seems too fluid, too multifarious to be encapsulated into a neat schema of upper-class dominance and lower-class exploitation. More complex causes need examination before we can accept a fully rounded picture of history (if such a goal can ever really be accomplished.) Antonio Gramsci's elaboration of cultural hegemony with Marxist roots stands as a welcome corrective to any tendency towards monocausality.

The elucidation of cultural hegemony by Gramsci, particularly in its discussions of how a societal elite seizes upon ideas and makes them tools to ensure conformity between classes, certainly becomes apropos to the consideration of social justice feminism and its counter-hegemonic movement against the prevailing concepts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By 1900 the tenets of *laissez-faire* capitalism seemed firmly in place, through which government barely registered as a presence on the capitalist maneuverings of a rapidly expanding economy, and the middle class, although at times discomfited by the changes inherent in the transformations of the Second Industrial Revolution, nonetheless readily accepted the adage that with hard work and determination a man could still

rise to the apex of society. Seeming exemplars such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie – men who started with modest means and who became the capitalist scions of the Gilded Age – exemplified this new cultural hegemony. In addition, the cultural hegemony continued after the Civil War the idea of a patriarchal society that could dominate the affairs of women within the United States, particularly in a political context.

Social justice feminists such as Florence Kelley countered these two prevailing hegemonic ideas by using the promotion and passage of women's labor legislation as an "entering wedge" for the eventual inclusion of all workers within the state's protection, and by increasing women's power within the existing patriarchal political party system. The first aim achieved substantial success by the end of the 1930s, as major laws such as the Social Security Act of 1935 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 received Congressional enactment. In addition, through the long-term efforts of Eleanor Roosevelt and Molly Dewson, women's power increased within the national Democratic party through the efforts of the Democratic National Committee's Women's Division. But even with these substantial successes, social justice feminism failed as a counter-hegemonic movement in two important ways. First, it never totally removed itself from the patriarchal political system prevalent in the United States, and second, it never made serious efforts to include women of color within its ranks.

Perhaps the most effective legacy of social justice feminism thus lies in its long-term participation in what Gramsci would term a "passive revolution" in not only helping to refute *laissez-faire* economic concepts by making the state a more substantial counterforce in terms of worker protection and regulation, but also in instilling in the United States' patriarchal political system a sense of feminist self-realization and power, however limited, This agency not only received revival and continuation by post-World War II labor feminists, but also prompted dramatic realization by the rights movement initiated in the 1960s by such organizations as the National Organization of Women (NOW) (Cobble, 2014, 2005; Collins, 2009).

Finally, Gramsci's theories about counter-hegemony may seem outmoded or *déclassé* in a society where social fragmentation becomes even more marked as each year of the early 21st century passes. But if we look closer, we can conclude that the means of maintaining a cultural hegemony have actually increased, even in the supposedly destabilizing wake of continued globalization. As previously noted, the dominance of neoliberalism's free market and individual property emphases now seems increasingly ineffective in an era of increased economic dislocation, surging outcries for social justice, and burgeoning environmental issues. Governments can no longer easily repress popular discourse in return for the seeming surcease of economic mobility. Such efforts can only result in failure, like the shipwrecked *outlier* Robinson Crusoe trying to escape the constant surveillance of drones in the firmament. Gramsci's theories, and their practical realizations in events such

as the ones described above, demonstrate both the potency of dominant cultural hegemonies and their counter-hegemonic responses.

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