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ARTICLE

Remembering Rochdale: The Cooperative Movement and the Post-Enclosure Atlantic

Eve O'Connor

Program in American Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, US
Email: eve_oconnor@g.harvard.edu

Abstract

The English weavers who organized what would become a flourishing cooperative business in 1844 remain famous worldwide. In the second half of the nineteenth century, their story traveled through a newly international labor press, inspiring workers to build cooperatives in the template set forth by the so-called "Rochdale Pioneers." While scholars have detailed the Rochdale model's impact on the cooperative movement itself, historians have missed its significance as a vector for wider changes in working-class politics. Drawing on cooperative movement literature and organizational records, this essay traces the transnational circulation of the Rochdale story from Britain to the United States from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. I explore how the Rochdale method's influence simultaneously standardized cooperative practices, and reflected a protracted shift in anti-capitalist struggles. Against the backdrop of land dispossession and anti-labor violence, the Rochdale experiment captured hopes for a cooperative economic strategy fit to survive in the modern era. Focusing on the rise of consumers' cooperation in the United States, I show how organizers mobilized a cooperative vision for a post-enclosure world—one consistent with the structure, if not the spirit, of private property and commodity markets. This article explores how the cooperative movement became a vital site for reimagining economic autonomy as industrial capitalism conscripted ever more people into wage labor.

Keywords: cooperatives; United States; commons; capitalism

Introduction

The modern history of cooperatives begins with a now-famous story. From the notorious social landscapes of industrial northern England, struggling weavers in a city called Rochdale met in the wake of a strike. Having failed to increase their wages, the group discussed alternative ways to meet their common needs. They decided to start a "cooperative" run and owned by the workers themselves. In 1844, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers opened a store stocked with only a handful of kitchen staples. Barely a decade later, the so-called "Rochdale Pioneers" had expanded from a small

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storefront to a mill and a shoe-making factory. With plans to integrate retail, manufacturing, and distribution, the Pioneers moved toward the dream for an autonomous cooperative society.[1] Soon, the story traveled. For those who know it well, other details follow: the store's location on Toad Lane, the names of the "original" Pioneers, their first provisions of flour, butter, sugar, and oats. In cooperative lore, these fragments linger. In 1931, the Rochdale store re-opened as a museum.[2] By 1937, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) adopted the "Rochdale principles" as standards for cooperative practice everywhere.[3] Almost two hundred years later, the Rochdale story invokes the precarious beginning of a still-precarious movement.[4]

The living cooperative movement calls on many global roots, but in cooperative history the Pioneers mark an inflection point.[5] In England, plans for cooperative ownership of land and industry had captivated workers for decades. Industrialization swept entire communities away from their means of subsistence and into wage labor. Cooperatives were an answer to this ever-eroding autonomy. By the 1830s, one cooperative store had already grown and collapsed in Rochdale.[6] What distinguished the Pioneers was not the cooperative idea itself, but rather their success. Cooperatives rested on a seemingly impossible proposal: businesses that could compete with capitalist firms, while refusing their hierarchical distributions of profit and power. The Pioneers appeared to meet this long-elusive challenge. Although the store sold at market prices and turned a healthy profit, their rules prevented wealth or control from concentrating among only a few: In the Rochdale Society, every member was an owner, and every owner had a vote. With limited returns on investment, the business instead allocated surpluses to members in proportion to their purchases (the "patronage dividend"). It was a delicate balance. The Rochdale store embraced capital accumulation while precluding profit as an end in itself—a cooperative strategy built against, but within, the growing industrial economy.

These features foretell the Rochdale story's fraught historical status. Born at the most famous frontline in the struggle of labor against capital, the Rochdale cooperative model seemed to abolish the difference between them. Cooperative stores operated from a counterintuitive premise: organizing the working class as consumers rather than producers.[7] Where worker or "producer" cooperatives reclaimed profits for those who rightfully earned them, a consumer cooperative was less about its members lives as workers than how to provision life itself—a reversal with both ideological and structural implications. While consumer cooperatives emerged with and through labor organizing, they proved controversial counterparts to the gritty struggles workers waged in factories, mines, and mills. In a broader critique of cooperatives, revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg argued that consumer cooperatives could hope to attack only "the twigs of the capitalist tree."[8] Scholars, in turn, associated consumer cooperatives with a "labor aristocracy" motivated more by inclusion in the new market economy than a desire for a genuine alternative, a reputation that diminished the movement's presence in working-class historiography.[9] Even in defending the cooperative movement from skeptical left-wing peers, Marxist economist Bruno Jossa specifically redeems cooperatives in their "producer" form.[10] Against consumer society's destructive march across the globe, the Rochdale story seems to capture the cooperative idea in its least transformational shape.

Within the cooperative movement, the Rochdale "myth" invites a similar kind of historical reckoning.[11] Professional and "in-house" historians have questioned the

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Pioneers' designation as "poor weavers," noting their relative advantages as skilled laborers and their access to elite supporters. At the same time, historians emphasize that the "cooperative principles" they inspired—from democratic governance to surplus-sharing—already existed well beyond England.[12] For scholars and cooperators alike, the Rochdale myth describes both a representational problem and an analytical one: The Pioneers dominate narratives of the movement's history, and constrain imagination about what economic "cooperation" means. Even efforts to challenge the Pioneers' monopoly move, necessarily, through Rochdale.[13] Revisionist cooperative histories underline how the Rochdale lineage ignores the movement's roots in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—precisely those traditions that could counter the racial and colonial hierarchies built into the Rochdale story.[14] As with the overrepresentation of British industrial workers in wider labor histories, critics characterize the Pioneers' position as Eurocentric: Rochdale is to the "cooperator" what greater Manchester is to the "worker."[15] Against so many potential beginnings, the Rochdale moment both overdetermines what the cooperative could be, and sidelines other histories that might lay claim to its origins.

This article confronts a tension running underneath these contestations, one that speaks to what makes cooperative history so hard to tell. Scholars characterize the cooperative movement as politically contradictory.[16] Modern cooperatives are either too much like capitalism, or too different to foreclose the possibility for something else. This friction shapes the discourse that surrounds the Rochdale myth. In one account, the Rochdale story reveals the cooperative to be labor in its coziest proximity to capital. In another, it misrecognizes the cooperative movement itself, obscuring wider tributaries that point to more radical ends. Where one critique recognizes cooperatives as constrained by their foundations, the other finds the movement's most transformative potential outside the Rochdale tradition. Neither fully explains how such disparate cooperative tendencies came to cohabitate in the same movement for so long.

In this essay, I explore the Rochdale story's transnational circulation to offer a different reading of the cooperative movement's distinctive political character. Just as historians struggle to locate the Pioneers between radicalism and reform, their story's many afterlives do not fit such frameworks neatly. Following cooperative developments in Britain and the United States, I argue that the Rochdale model's dispersal across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inventoried broader changes in working-class politics. As other cooperative pathways narrowed, diversely rooted cooperative organizers coalesced around the Rochdale plan as a last grasp at otherwise shattered prospects for economic autonomy—a process that challenges interpretations of the movement as methodologically conservative or historically fixed. For those denied justice in the realm of production, consumer cooperatives held out hope to reclaim what was lost in an era of wages. Closed off from their means of subsistence, and often their homelands, communities organized cooperatives in towns where they lived and labored. In the process, diverse cooperative lineages gathered into a novel coalition.

The original Rochdale myth

The Rochdale story's mythic status originated in its own time. Scholars of the cooperative movement trace the Pioneers' influence to George Jacob Holyoake, the socialist

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writer and advocate who made their story famous. More than anyone else, Holyoake popularized the Rochdale method and drew the contours for what would become the Rochdale myth. He published *Self-Help By the People: The History of Co-operation in Rochdale* in 1858, just over a decade after the Pioneers sold their first provisions. Although he called his book a "history," Holyoake was, in fact, the Pioneers' contemporary. Holyoake had been a follower of social reformer and cooperative enthusiast Robert Owen, a Chartist, and a secularist. When the Rochdale Pioneers opened their store in 1844, he became a supporter and propagandist. William Cooper, a founding Rochdale Society member, served as a key informant for his study.[17] Written as a study of a project still in formation, Holyoake's account transformed the Rochdale origin story from a local dispatch into a global watershed.[18]

Holyoake introduced the Pioneers as beacons for a new cooperative era. To him, the Pioneers' success showed that the poor had finally learned to turn capitalism's power to their own ends. *Self-Help* revealed an intimate relationship between the Rochdale model and mainstream economic thought. Criticizing workers' reluctance to engage in financial practices—namely, debt and interest—Holyoake blamed earlier cooperators for being "too moral to be useful." By contrast, he identified the Pioneers' newfound success in their willingness to make use of economic instruments otherwise implicated in their exploitation. Describing the Pioneers' approach as a reckoning with "political economy," he lauded cooperators for submitting to an education in "industrial science" from John Stuart Mill.[19] If they followed in their footsteps, Holyoake argued, workers everywhere could—like the Pioneers—"supersede tradesmen, millowners, and capitalists" by becoming "merchants and manufacturers" themselves.[20]

Holyoake's writing presaged the antiradical readings that would follow the Rochdale story, and with it the whole cooperative movement. As a history of resistance, *Self-Help* was peculiar. The Pioneers' turn to political economy, an emerging "science," implied a retreat from unrulier methods. Holyoake aligned the Pioneers with a tactical shift in working-class organizing—a pivot from "passion" to "brains."[21] The "old cooperators" Holyoake decried included short-lived experiments by Owenites and the Christian Socialists, but he also alluded to more rebellious peers. Amid widespread unrest in England, the Pioneers implied a change in attitude as much as strategy. To Holyoake, it was a favorable one. As a "moral force" Chartist, Holyoake himself had declined to participate in riots in Birmingham in the 1830s.[22] If the old cooperators were lawless, the new cooperation was characterized by its studied lawfulness: The bulk of *Self-Help* detailed the Rochdale store's careful handling of investment, dividends, and pricing. The "new" cooperators launched a struggle with capitalism built on its bones.

In this turn to political economy, Holyoake's narrative effaced more revolutionary cooperative prehistories. Cooperative organization was hardly new in the repertoire of workers' struggles in Britain. As early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, principles like democratic governance and profit-sharing were key features of what historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker call "hydrarchy from below," a collective protest against the brutal labor discipline needed to power maritime trade. Maroon societies shared resources collectively, forging communities that transcended race and nation.[23] Pirates—often themselves escaped sailors—refused to recreate captains' authority on their vessels, instead endowing the crew with democratic control

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over leadership and sharing equally in the fruits of their exploits.[24] Such practices developed as forceful refusals of slavery, wage labor, and the many forms in between. The first workers to counter capitalism with cooperation in the British Atlantic did so not as participants in capitalist trade, but instead as saboteurs.

Holyoake's account captured the slippage developing between capitalism and cooperation in the nineteenth century. He argued the political insight generated from the Rochdale experience lay in the discovery that workers could not "fight capital without capital."[25] To lessen their reliance on state and financial institutions, the Rochdale Society had collected its starting capital from the workers themselves, who then became owners. Holyoake emphasized that the Pioneers' store came into existence after each member contributed only "twopence," a number that would enliven cooperative lore for generations. The very premise of the cooperative thus asked each worker to, in Holyoake's words, "become a capitalist."[26] This cooperative model redefined the meaning of "capital" itself: economic power characterized not by bigness, but by the pointillist power of collective smallness.

Self-Help offered the first articulation of what would become the "Rochdale principles."[27] The Rochdale principles (or "rules") reflected the sensitive interplay between working-class anti-capitalism and the development of cooperative finance. Above all, the Rochdale model targeted the profit motive. While the Rochdale Society's bylaws enabled the business to lure capital with interest, they called for cash sales only as a "radical objection to credit." Most importantly, the bylaws limited the shares any single member could hold and imposed a maximum rate on returns, no matter how profitable the business was or might become. The Rochdale store eventually allocated profits as follows: first to general expenses, then to capital reserves, and finally to an education fund—a move that explicitly prioritized the movement's vitality over potential gains for members. Only then could leftover surplus be distributed back to members in proportion to their purchases.[28] These patronage dividends functioned not as returns on investment, but as savings on money already spent; rather than rewarding investors, dividends recognized consumption (or "use" in cooperative vernacular) as the store's ultimate purpose. Like other cooperative procedures, the rules governing finances contained a political theory: the principles sought to abolish the pursuit of profit for its own sake.

These maneuverings point to the boundaries of cooperators' willingness to fully accede the dominant market economy. The Rochdale model was simultaneously a modern business, and a tribute to an ethic under assault. The demand for "use" over "profit" underlined this basic premise. As historian E.P. Thompson argues, the poor in England had long defended the right to meet their needs free from profiteering "middlemen," especially in markets for food.[29] This forgotten "consensus" lays the backdrop for his famous defense of the "English crowd"—people who joined in actions including targeting mills, blockading wagons exporting grain away from hungry mouths, and in one case, "pelting an unpopular dealer with his own potatoes."[30] For poor and working people, the presence or absence of profit went beyond the demand for affordable food—it measured the distance between "the old moral economy of provision" and "the new political economy of the free market."[31] Set between the past and the future, consumer cooperatives fused modern political economy with an older tradition of production for use.

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What made *Self-Help* such a promising outline for the cooperative movement as a whole was the path it showed to a fully autonomous cooperative society.[32] For all the pages Holyoake devoted to finance, the innovations that secured Rochdale's status were largely social. While the "one member, one vote" rule gave each member equal power, Holyoake stressed that the Rochdale Society broke from neighboring cooperatives by declaring "open" membership to all, notably including women.[33] Even as Owenite idealism wore off, plans to integrate production, manufacturing, and housing bore traces of the cooperative movement's entanglement with socialist feminism's utopian spirit.[34] By moving beyond industrial production, the Rochdale plan aimed to broaden the cooperative movement's potential base. This egalitarian premise would bolster the Rochdale legacy long term: If their own social advantages made the Pioneers' triumph possible, their principles opened a pathway for a larger cooperative movement to eventually arrive. Democratic inclusion implied a material counterpart: the consumer included everybody, wage worker or not.

Cooperative modernization

While the Pioneers are little known outside the cooperative movement, their backdrop has given the Rochdale story unique historical resonance. Rochdale sits just miles from Manchester, the heart of textile manufacturing that by the nineteenth century had become the "most industrialized city in the world."[35] The mills and factories transforming northern England made it synonymous with the industrial revolution, and so with capitalism itself. As the world's "first" cooperative grew up, Karl Marx was developing a critique of political economy as a witness to changes in places like Rochdale.[36] The Pioneers entered history on an already-global stage.

If the British industrial revolution is where the modern world begins, the Rochdale story invites a perennial counterfactual—a shadow cooperative world that might have emerged instead. As historian Johnston Birchall notes, consumer cooperatives did best in European regions undergoing "a similar process of modernization."[37] After all, consumer cooperatives implied an end to self-provisioning—stores on the Rochdale model assumed a market economy. In the mid-nineteenth century, industrialization catalyzed cooperative stores, first in England and then across Europe. For historians, it is through this very process that cooperatives become "modern." Following this chronology, scholars describe the movement as akin to its own developmental stage—as one study notes, consumer cooperatives "may emerge in any society where people are not engaged in subsistence agriculture and are thus reliant on the market for their food."[38]

Market inclusion was key to the Rochdale triumph in Holyoake's telling. On the very same page, Holyoake could describe cooperatives as an effort to "supersede" capitalism, and refer to the Pioneers themselves as "Lilliputian capitalists," underdogs creating their own industrial economy in miniature.[39] His wordplay hinted at how, by their very participation in the market, cooperatives ultimately belonged to the global (capitalist) economy. The Pioneers themselves expressed racial and national entitlements to "expect the assets of New World slavery."[40] Holyoake praised the Rochdale store for enabling even "poor men" to buy the "purest sugar" and the "best tea."[41] More than mere kitchen staples, these tropical commodities traced a tightening circuit

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between textile districts like Lancashire and plantations in the Americas, an economy that relied on English laborers as both producers and (increasingly) consumers. Among poor workers, novel "necessities" like sugar established a growing link between what Sidney Mintz calls the "will to work and will to consume."[42] In the Rochdale story, the "consumer-consciousness" Thompson identified in the moral economy met up with the British Empire's expanding consumer society.[43]

The meeting between these phenomena comes with high interpretive stakes. While scholars describe cooperatives as built on contradiction, a historical view suggests that *concession* would be at least as apt. As legal scholar Tara Mulqueen observes, in England, the "inclosure" of the cooperative in law paralleled the physical enclosure of commons—land held, and used, collectively.[44] As workers turned to cooperatives, the centuries-long struggle against enclosure was being reinvented in the Chartist mobilization. "Chartists" were dangerous not only for their demand for expanded suffrage (the centerpiece of their famous "People's Charter") but also their militant stance against landed property. While Chartists championed cooperatives, many did not share Holyoake's reverence for the virtues of political economy. Cooperative ownership offered just one technique in a broader agenda to redistribute land and resources. As historian Malcolm Chase writes, Chartist reforms "shared a 'way of seeing' land that was shaped by ideas of shared access, usage, and control rather than by possessive individualism." Chartism had its roots in these "agrarian ideals."[45] Understood in this vein, cooperatives, in a sense, reconstituted commons. Beneath the call for cooperatives lurked a more threatening demand: socializing the means of subsistence by reclaiming land from capital.

Behind Holyoake's parable, class struggle in England had been changing. The date now memorialized as the cooperative movement's beginning, 1844, tracked new developments in English corporate law. The Rochdale Society first incorporated as a "friendly society."[46] As with later cooperative legislation, parliament had institutionalized friendly societies in the late eighteenth century amid rising poor rates, the property tax that funded poor relief.[47] Historian Penelope Ismay observes that through friendly societies—themselves adaptions of medieval trade and craft guilds quashed in centuries prior—workers "refashioned their own practices of mutuality" for their mobile, modern lives. In organizing networks for financial self-reliance, they also comforted reformers eager to free the state from its welfare obligations. As "solutions for radicalism," cooperatives, like friendly societies, occupied a strained political space between grassroots collectivism and top-down reaction.[48] As Mulqueen finds, even sympathetic reformers who supported cooperative legislation argued that investing the poor in "the laws of political economy" would "rid them of their political utopianism." Far from unleashing a worker-run economy, lawmakers hoped that the "market itself" would "discipline" workers.[49] In the mid-nineteenth century, cooperatives joined this effort to refit practices of mutual aid into market logics, a tug of war between struggling workers and an expanding capitalist state.

The specter of this compromise hangs over the Pioneers' story. The fear of revolution that conditioned the Rochdale moment left enduring imprints on the cooperative's corporate form (what Mulqueen refers to as its "constitutive historicity").[50] It was no coincidence that the famous Rochdale Society first took form in a retail business. Law-abiding entrepreneurs were not just easier to contend with than riotous Chartists

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or striking workers—cooperative stores had especially favorable implications for the new status quo. The fact that support for cooperatives increased amid Chartist repression points to the disciplinary function the newly sanctioned cooperative could serve: Against those demanding the land itself, the Pioneers' willingness to buy food on the market made them less frightening rebels. As historian Steven Stoll notes, "People who consume their own product do not contribute to the growth and expansion of capital," nor do they "exchange in markets or participate in the state." By tethering people to the market for their everyday needs, consumer cooperatives helped diffuse a "fear of household food production" that had preoccupied political economists since at least the seventeenth century.[51] In flaunting their worldy goods, Holyoake reminded readers that the Pioneers, whatever their quirks, belonged to the new economy. The modern cooperative movement was made for a post-enclosure world—the "new" cooperators obeyed the rules of private property and commodity markets, even if they did not necessarily respect them.

But not all cooperators shed their revolutionary horizons. The rapid growth of the cooperative movement after Chartism's fall suggests workers, too, saw cooperation as an alternative to radicalism, even when they were themselves the "radicals" in question. The original Pioneer ranks included Chartists, socialists, and Owenites.[52] In their most militant tenor, cooperators reinforced the struggle between workers and capitalists as a battle for subsistence.[53] Classic activities on the English commons, such as grazing animals and gathering food, supplemented incomes and helped people weather unemployment.[54] Cooperatives similarly lessened members' dependence on wage labor. A cooperative was not just a store but also a scene of mutual aid, a means to hold one's savings, a community, and for some, a job. It was, like the commons, a place where everyday needs floated free from the drive for profit. Perhaps in this spirit, Thompson claimed the "moral economy of the crowd" survived in the early consumer cooperative movement.[55] Cooperatives generated a financial sleight of hand: a means to mobilize market mechanisms against the market itself.

Holyoake's title captured the emergent movement's dilemma. Among workers, "self-help" invoked an old and ongoing demand for autonomy, but for those in power it redefined mutualist practices in capitalist terms. This two-sided ideology manifested in the Pioneers' ambition to build a "self-supporting home-colony"—a concept that captivated both utopian socialists, and moral reformers aiming to sweep industrial society's outcasts into productive work. Through the language of independence, the Rochdale model entered cooperators into a permanent dance with the politics of respectability.[56] By encouraging workers to turn entrepreneurs, leverage capital investment, and reward risk with interest, *Self-Help* assumed a tone strikingly consistent with elite hopes to instill in workers the beauty of markets. Holyoake's origin story seemed to build this reactionary fantasy—turning strikes and riots into compliance—into its very plot. The new cooperative method offered a novel political strategy: working-class autonomy disguised as acquiescence.

The Rochdale story's Atlantic crossing

A decade after *Self-Help*'s publication, the pace of cooperative development had accelerated. Holyoake's writing was translated into numerous languages, and international

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correspondence poured into Rochdale.[57] *Self-Help* became a how-to manual for workers setting up cooperative stores across Europe, making its way into writings and speeches in Italy, Germany, Russia, France, Australia, and the United States. By 1867, Holyoake himself attributed the book's popularity to the fact it had been "found useful in originating stores."[58] Holyoake's writing helped establish the Pioneers as the movement's "founding fathers."[59] What made the Rochdale model such a powerful roadmap for a global movement was the implication that cooperative principles—like the principles of political economy in general—operated in the same way everywhere. By recounting the Pioneers' success, Holyoake gave the world a duplicable model and a "serviceable myth."[60]

By the late nineteenth century, consumers' cooperatives intermingled with worker cooperatives, savings banks, voluntary associations, and various forms of profit sharing as cooperative solutions to industrial inequality and the unrest it guaranteed. Historian Daniel Rodgers observes that in rapidly industrializing Europe and the United States, cooperatives offered an alternative to welfare that appealed to workers and reformers alike. As tools designed to put workers' survival in their own hands, cooperatives invigorated debates within the labor movement over the question of autonomy and how, or if, to align with the "bourgeois" state.[61] While consumer cooperatives were only one approach among many, as workers found success with the Pioneers' method the Rochdale principles became well-known as cooperative best practices. The Rochdale story linked the dream for cooperative production to the savings workers could generate from running cooperative stores. Trade unions saw consumer cooperatives as a way to channel capital toward their own cooperatively run enterprises. In the process, the Rochdale method became an object of uncommonly wide endorsement: a strategy that could nurture hopes for an independent cooperative economy, while holding off more violent manifestations of class conflict. Through the turn of the twentieth century, capitalism and consumer cooperatives expanded "hand in hand."[62]

What unfolded in Britain tempers the romance attached to the scrappy Rochdale store. Against more insurgent articulations of cooperation emerging across the globe, historians have found in the Pioneers' legacy a kind of declension narrative. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the British cooperative movement became a commercial powerhouse. In 1863, consumer cooperatives established the Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS) to supply their own stores. The CWS opened its first global outpost in New York in 1876, and others in European cities through the 1880s. By the early twentieth century, the CWS had made its own claims on British colonies, acquiring tea plantations in Ceylon and India.[63] As British cooperative institutions gained strength, their likeness to conventional firms dimmed the features that made them different. While the Rochdale principles curbed profit as a motive for owners or investors, they did not preclude profit-seeking behaviors to increase patronage dividends. Nor did they guarantee that the benefits of cooperation would extend to those who worked for cooperative stores, or harvested the produce stocked on their shelves. Domestically, consumer cooperatives generally supported unionization and compared favorably to other employers, but their control by consumer-members could generate conflicts with employees that often worsened with market pressures.[64] Overseas, on the other hand,

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CWS plantations increased surpluses through exploiting colonial labor in ways that differed little from conventional capitalist firms.[65] Moreover, as historian Aaron Windel documents, British cooperative leaders eventually collaborated with colonial offices on cooperative development projects designed to maintain British control over economies in Africa and Asia (even as some acknowledged that doing so required actions "antithetical to cooperative principles").[66] The movement launched in Rochdale lived out the contradiction Holyoake anticipated decades before: the bigger cooperative markets grew in economic terms, the more they came to look like capitalism writ large.[67]

Yet cooperative thought and action also radicalized as it globalized. New cooperative movements reproduced the antagonisms between top-down and bottom-up cooperation that characterized the Rochdale moment. Cooperative developments in the British Empire paralleled nineteenth-century Lancashire, as the state deployed cooperatives to "stabilize colonial rule" against the specter of revolt.[68] As Windel finds, the "official" cooperative movement faced recurrent opposition from local organizers leveraging cooperatives to wrest back control over land and markets. For example, anti-colonial activists in Eastern Africa drew on their own cooperative traditions, even as they integrated European models.[69] Along these lines, historian Nikolay Kamenov argues the cooperative movement's global history is more accurately understood through "circuits of dissemination," rather than "diffusionist" narratives focused on the movement's ostensible origins.[70] While these cooperative practices did not grow outward from Rochdale, recurrent entanglements between "official" and vernacular cooperative forces empowered a discourse on cooperative principles that shaped the movement as a whole.[71] The British movement's own submerged counter-history suggests such defiant cooperative formations have not been outliers in the modern cooperative tradition, but instead may well define it.

The trajectory of cooperatives in the United States illustrated how the Rochdale story's meaning evolved as an international movement developed. As in Europe, US cooperatives sped up in the mid-nineteenth century in response to the threat industrial capitalism posed to craft traditions. While American cooperators at first adopted the Pioneers' method unevenly, the Rochdale story's circulation reinvigorated cooperative organizing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Horace Greeley published *Self-Help* in the *New York Tribune* in 1859, and union journals copied it widely. Holyoake himself embarked on tours of US cities in 1879 and 1882.[72] Between 1865 and 1890, historian Steven Leikin writes that US workers organized hundreds of producer cooperatives and "potentially thousands" of consumer cooperatives, inspired by the Rochdale model's "new and more practical form."[73]

The ghosts of past expropriations shaped the human geography of consumers' cooperation in the United States. As historian Mike Davis writes, European migrants consistently remarked on the "absence of residual precapitalist class structures and social institutions" in the country, notably including cooperatives.[74] Cooperative societies took on particular significance in immigrant communities resisting their dual exploitation by low wages and high prices, as well as the individualistic scripts of American culture. The year before Holyoake made his first visit to the United States in 1879, English and Irish workers in Maynard, Massachusetts organized the Riverside Cooperative Association, part of a transatlantic constellation of consumers' cooperatives organized in the booming textile industry.[75] Regional cooperative strongholds established

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in immigrant communities like Maynard—most significantly Finnish—provided core constituencies for the consumers' cooperative movement that would cohere in the twentieth century.[76]

The US cooperative resurgence showcased wider horizons for cooperative politics in the "free labor" era.[77] The Rochdale principles assumed new salience as visions for racial labor solidarity emerged in the wake of the Civil War. As political economist Jessica Gordon Nembhard documents, African American cooperatives stemmed from older mutualist practices that included pooling resources to escape slavery, grow food, and buy land.[78] While cooperatives predated the war, political theorist Alex Gourevitch writes that the abolition of slavery amid industrial expansion allowed cooperation to finally emerge as a "unifying, national cause."[79] The first major national cooperative campaign came under the Knights of Labor, an interracial labor organization that reflected a "second moment of working-class formation" aimed at overcoming divisions by race, ethnicity, gender, and skill.[80] While Gourevitch observes that the Knights' "labor republicanism" emphasized producer cooperatives, challenging the Pioneers' focus on consumption, their critique shared lineage with the radical agrarian tradition that had shaped cooperation in England.[81] Concerned less with production or consumption per se than with their reunification under workers' control, this epistemology ultimately envisioned cooperation as the end of wage labor (as Gourevitch puts it, "freedom in *and* from work").[82] As industrialization demanded ever more people enter its workforce, abolition brought a new potential constituency into the "cooperative commonwealth."[83] Through the nineteenth century, a loose coalition of farmers, industrial workers, and Populists organized cooperatives of all kinds. While many did not survive the economic sabotage and violence mobilized against them by planters, merchants, and bankers, their momentum showed the power—and threat—of cooperative solidarity.[84]

These early cooperative cultures provided the social base for a new national movement to emerge in the twentieth century. Around the turn of the century, the international cooperative movement underwent a marked shift. Templates for "producer cooperation" in agriculture and trades lost ground to "consumers' cooperation" in the Rochdale mold.[85] Amid these global transitions, a new generation of US cooperative organizers mobilized under the banner of the "consumers' cooperative movement." In 1916, the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA) formed in New York City with the mission to create a national federation of cooperative societies built on the Rochdale principles.[86] This turn toward consumption tracked changes in industrial production that rendered many workers without stable employment or trade union protections. CLUSA's first president, James Warbasse, acknowledged that the movement owed its revival to immigrants from Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Italy, Russia, Germany, and Belgium—the often-unorganized masses of the industrial working class.[87] Though not without conservative elements, the most robust cooperative societies emerged in Finnish communities, where workers facing retaliation for labor organizing claimed consumer cooperatives for the class struggle. In the textile mills of Massachusetts and the mining districts of Lake Superior, Finnish radicals used cooperative stores to support striking workers and left-wing political parties, rejecting the cooperative discourse of interclass détente.[88] By the 1920s, cooperative stores mapped a growing economy stretching from New England to the upper Midwest.

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For those who turned to consumers' cooperation, the Rochdale method provided a template that could unite workers exploited, but also badly divided, in the realm of production. Advocates characterized consumers' cooperation as a solidaristic alternative to the "occupational groups" that formed the basis for producer cooperation, an idea usually associated with farmers or industrial workers (groups who sought to redistribute profits, but did not necessarily share the consumer critique of profit as such).[89] In this sense, consumers' cooperation offered an answer to the exclusions of American producerism.[90] US cooperative leaders reinforced that the Rochdale rules implicitly prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, politics, or religion—the very divisions weakening the broader labor movement.[91] For supporters, this pivot did not mean abandoning the quest to cooperativize production, at least in theory. Instead, it reversed the order of operations: Consumer cooperatives would enable communities to generate capital, which could then be used to procure inputs for manufacturing, ideally in partnership with producer cooperatives or trade unions—an inverted echo of the Knights' "universal system of co-operative production."[92] This was the complicated utopianism the Rochdale story signified: In reclaiming needs directly, consumers' cooperation also distanced cooperative politics from the idioms of labor and work. Warbasse thus introduced the new movement as "an organized force by means of which control of the necessities of life by the people themselves is made possible."[93]

With this blueprint, cooperative leaders elevated consumers' cooperation as a framework for the movement as a whole. In addition to stores, CLUSA advised groups building farming, housing, and worker cooperatives using the Rochdale principles. US cooperative leaders especially worked to differentiate "true cooperatives" from profit-sharing schemes that did not give workers votes in operations, a position that echoed trade unions' skepticism toward employee stock ownership programs.[94] For example, when a dress manufacturer inquired about its plans for employee ownership, Warbasse warned, "if your idea is profit-sharing, that is giving the workers an interest in the business, but not absolute control, we have nothing to offer."[95] Efforts to defend the "true" cooperative principles illuminated the stakes of defining cooperatives as the movement grew worldwide. With the Rochdale rules, cooperative organizers brought coherence to a movement complicated by layered historical traditions and variable interpretations. Cooperation was no longer "theory or guess-work," but a tried and tested science.[96]

As a decentralized movement took shape, Black cooperators enlisted the Rochdale rules as tools toward their own political horizons. In New York, CLUSA's emergence coalesced with an independent network of Black-led cooperative organizations of similarly capacious ideological persuasions. In 1919, Warbasse joined the first meeting of the Negro Cooperative Guild at the invitation of W.E.B. Du Bois.[97] Du Bois and his allies argued that Black people excluded from trade unions and denied productive capacities, such as land, held more potential power as consumers.[98] The Guild's calculus was tactical as much as economic: under the threat of racist violence within and against organized labor, Du Bois offered cooperatives as a more immediate means to harness the "protective separatism of the Negro group" toward economic independence.[99] Du Bois' writings helped link domestic efforts to Pan-African cooperative currents taking shape in the 1920s.[100] In 1930, George Schuyler and Ella Baker articulated an openly "militant" plan for a Black cooperative economy with the Harlem-based Young

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Negroes' Cooperative League (YNCL).[101] Their organizing combined the Rochdale technique with an anarchist commitment to mutual aid (a position literary scholar Irvin Hunt describes as "government sanctioned anarchy").[102]

Holyoake's story echoed in this new cooperative movement. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Rochdale Pioneers filled the pages of cooperative literature. A popular pamphlet entitled, "The Story of Toad Lane" excerpted entire passages from Holyoake's original account.[103] Ritual tellings became routine. When cooperators organized a store in Evanston, Illinois in 1935, their recruitment pamphlet referred not only to the store's opening, but also the first of its kind: "It all began in Rochdale, England, ninety years ago, when a group of twenty-eight poor weavers, oppressed and exploited by their 'owners,' decided to do something about it."[104] After embarking on his own visit to the CWS in England, Schuyler sent a dispatch instructing all YNCL members to learn "the history and principles of co-operation": "You are the pioneers" he wrote, "and it is your duty to teach the masses."[105] Retold by their twentieth-century interlocutors, the Pioneers' story invoked a movement that still remained unfinished. As Evanston cooperators cautioned new members, "utopia is not here yet."[106]

Conclusion

The cooperative movement's political legacy remains a historical puzzle. While the Rochdale plan energized demands for liberation from wage labor, it also manifested state-led efforts to quell revolutionary fervor. A dominant interpretation thus recalls the Rochdale story as one of "depoliticization."[107] As historian John K. Walton writes, the Pioneers "seemed to fit most obviously into the standard narratives" whereby "the male skilled and supervisory strata of the industrial working class became 'respectable.'"[108] Despite the movement's many transformations, these impressions have colored its fate in wider historical scholarship. Even as radical labor histories proliferated after World War II, cooperatives remained marginal in accounts of industrial-era resistance.[109] The cooperative movement has lived in a historiographical bind: too weak to register as a significant counterforce against capitalism, too compromised to inspire yearnings for the world that might have been.

I argue that we can better understand the cooperative movement's embattled political life by tracing the tentative solidarities it forged as time went by. If the Rochdale method's expanding imprint reflected a compromise with the market, it also tracked the violence that brought so many different populations into the cooperative fold. Transported to settler colonies in North America, the cooperative, like the commons before it, entered a space already enclosed.[110] The consolidation of a cooperative coalition in the twentieth century followed protracted shifts in anti-capitalist struggles, as communities absorbed into wage labor and consumer society began to rework them from the inside.[111] Through this coalescence, prolific cooperative traditions found new form in businesses that were privately-owned and market-based. While interrogating this contradiction exposes why the movement's anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist incarnations have so easily been pushed to its margins, it can also overlook compelling historical problems that cooperatives raise—the symbiotic relationship between anti-labor repression and cooperative organizing, the fragile partnership between cooperation and trade unionism, the challenge of building alliances on opposite ends of capitalist exchange. Modern cooperatives both generated a novel

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economy, and reflected shrinking possibilities for economic cooperation. Interpreting cooperative history thus rests on an analytical problem familiar to labor historians: the difficult causal relationship between agency and defeat. The modernist future that the cooperative movement promised simultaneously exposed the limits of its radical designs.

Yet the desire to remake the commons had never entirely gone. The cooperative movement's arc underlined the distance between what it meant to own the "the necessities of life" before and after enclosure. This gave cooperators a necessarily imaginative task: reinventing the connection between political ambition and material structure. Against the shadow of dispossession and the labor movement's limits, the Rochdale story charted another path to reclaim the means of subsistence in and for the industrial age. While organizing consumer cooperatives in 1935, Ella Baker could thus invoke a time "when the soil and all of its resources will be reclaimed by its rightful owners—the working masses of the world."[112] The comingling of cooperatives and commons in the "solidarity economy" still today resonates less as evidence of an unsolved contradiction than as a testament to the adaptive purpose the movement has long fulfilled.[113] As industrial modernity took hold, the cooperative movement reorganized visions of what else there could be. Once a necessary concession, cooperatives became an outer edge of possibility for autonomy under capitalism.

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Notes

1. George Jacob Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People: Thirty-Three Years of Co-operation in Rochdale*, Ninth ed. (London: Trübner & Co., 1882), chap. 1.
2. Mary Hilson et al., eds., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation Since 1850: Movements and Businesses*, 28 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 17.
3. The ICA formally adopted the Rochdale principles in 1937. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 48.
4. Today, many cooperative institutions still route their histories through reference to the Rochdale Pioneers and 1844. See "7 Cooperative Principles – Values of a Co-Op," NCBA CLUSA, accessed August 15, 2023, https://ncbaclusa.coop/resources/7-cooperative-principles/; "Our History," International Cooperative Alliance, accessed August 15, 2023, https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/history-cooperative-movement.
5. John K. Walton notes that the Pioneers are specifically "regarded as the originators of modern co-operation … usually represented as the founders of the most successful and geographically wide-ranging version of the Co-operative movement" John K. Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," *Labour History Review* (Leeds) 80, no. 3 (2015): 215.
6. Johnston Birchall, *The International Co-Operative Movement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 3–4.
7. Nicole Robertson, *The Cooperative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 4.
8. Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (Militant Publications, 1986), chap. 7.
9. Discussions of this skepticism can be found in studies by two notable exceptions. See Peter Gurney, *Co-Operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 2–7; Robertson, *The Cooperative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960*, 5–8; For a critical appraisal of the more recent generation of consumer cooperatives, see Andrew Zitcer,

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"Food Co-Ops and the Paradox of Exclusivity," *Antipode* 47, no. 3 (2015): 812–28, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12129.

10. Bruno Jossa, "Marx, Marxism and the Cooperative Movement," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 29, no. 1 (2005): 16.

11. The language of the Rochdale "myth" is ubiquitous in cooperative histories. See Mary Hilson, "A Consumers' International? The International Cooperative Alliance and Cooperative Internationalism, 1918–1939: A Nordic Perspective," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. 2 (2011): 210; Tara Mulqueen, "History, Alterity and Obligation: Toward a Genealogy of the Co-Operative," in *Law, Obligation, Community*, 1st ed., with Daniel Matthews and Scott Veitch (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 123; Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," 216.

12. For an overview of these debates, see Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," 227–237.

13. In one instance, Mary Hilson surveys broader cooperative developments in a chapter illustratively titled "Rochdale and Beyond." Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, chap. 3.

14. For example, Hilson, Neunsinger, and Patmore observe that European histories often ignore "pre-colonial knowledge and practices of co-operation." Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 4.

15. Anna Tsing describes how English industrial workers came to be "figurative protagonists of a social movement that, through the progressive generalities they seemed to embody, moved far beyond Manchester." Anna Tsing, "Supply Chains and the Human Condition," *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 2 (2009): 153.

16. A discussion of this dynamic in the British context that speaks to broader patterns can be found in historian Mo Moulton's description of cooperation as an "ambivalent tool." Mo Moulton, "Co-Opting the Cooperative Movement? Development, Decolonization, and the Power of Expertise at the Co-Operative College, 1920s-1960," *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 3 (2022): 420.

17. Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People*, 54.

18. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 62–64.

19. Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People*, 24.

20. Ibid., 2.

21. Ibid., 7.

22. "Description of Holyoake, George-Jacob 1817-1906, Papers of George Jacob Holyoake, 1830-1906. National Co-Operative Archive. GB 1499 on the Archives Hub Website," November 8, 2023, https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/41d0b566-478e-33b8-a968-43bf5656c594.

23. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, 2nd edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 126.

24. Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 158–62.

25. Holyoake, *Self-Help by the People*, 7.

26. In Rochdale, members could put up capital to become owners as consumers, and later as workers in the manufacturing department, where profits were returned in proportion to wages rather than purchases. Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People,* 56.

27. Holyoake's book identified fourteen general points that appeared on early lists of Rochdale principles. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 63.

28. For initial share policies, see Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People*, 10–16; On early updates, see Brett Fairbairn, "The Meaning of Rochdale: The Rochdale Pioneers and the Co-Operative Principles", Occasional Paper Series, (Center for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, 1994), 7–9.

29. Thompson notes that millers and bakers were "considered as servants of the community, working not for a profit but for a fair allowance," a view retained in regulations governing the price of bread. E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* 50 (1971): 83–84.

30. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," 116.

31. Ibid., 136.

32. The founding Rochdale documents included plans for "production, distribution, education, and government". Fairbairn, "The Meaning of Rochdale", 5.

33. Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," 17.

34. Historian Barbara Taylor documents that Owenite socialists in England supported female economic independence through marriage reform, sexual freedom, and women-owned cooperatives. Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chaps. 2, 4.

35. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), ix.

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36. Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), xv–xviii.
37. Birchall, *The International Co-Operative Movement*, 11.
38. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 25.
39. Holyoake, *Self-Help by the People*, 2.
40. Tsing, "Supply Chains and the Human Condition," 153.
41. Holyoake, *Self-Help by the People*, 39.
42. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York and London: Penguin Books, 1986).
43. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," 79.
44. Mulqueen, "History, Alterity and Obligation," 134.
45. Malcolm Chase, "Chartism and the Land: 'The Mighty People's Question'" in Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, eds., *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 59.
46. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 65.
47. Penelope Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers: Friendly Societies in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 47.
48. Ismay, *Trust Among Strangers: Friendly Societies in Modern Britain*, 12.
49. Mulqueen, "History, Alterity and Obligation," 129–31.
50. Tara Ann Mulqueen, "Constituting the Co-Operative: Law and the Political in the History of the English Co-Operative Movement" (Dissertation, School of Law, Birbeck College, University of London, 2018), 9.
51. Steven Stoll, "The Captured Garden: The Political Ecology of Subsistence under Capitalism," *International Labor and Working Class History* 85 (2014): 89.
52. Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," 244–245; Gurney notes that cooperatives became increasingly important to Chartists "after the failure of direct, insurrectionary tactics in 1939." Gurney, *Co-Operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930*, 15.
53. Stoll, "The Captured Garden: The Political Ecology of Subsistence under Capitalism," 83.
54. Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons For All*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), 102.
55. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," 136.
56. Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People*, 11; Barbara Arneil, "The Failure of Planned Happiness: The Rise and Fall of British Home Colonies," in *Happiness and Utility*, with Mark Philp and Georgios Varouxakis (London: UCL Press, 2019), 269–73.
57. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 63–64.
58. Holyoake, *Self-Help By the People*, sec. Preface.
59. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 62.
60. Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," 221.
61. Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000), 18.
62. Hilson et al., *A Global History of Consumer Co-Operation*, 8.
63. Ibid., 565–66.
64. For details on consumer cooperatives as employers, see Robertson, *The Cooperative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960*, chap. 8.
65. Aaron Windel, *Cooperative Rule: Community Development in Britain's Late Empire* (Oakland, University of California Press, 2021), 150.
66. Windel, *Cooperative Rule*, 56.
67. As Kamenov observes, "By the process of enhancing and making commodity chains more efficient, cooperatives partook in the overall broadening of the global market economy of the twentieth century." Nikolay Kamenov, "Imperial Cooperative Experiments and Global Market Capitalism, c.1900-c.1960," *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 2 (2019): 236.
68. Windel, *Cooperative Rule*, 9.
69. On the dynamics between colonial cooperative development and counter-formations in the 1920s and 1930s, see Windel, *Cooperative Rule*, chap. 1; for details on anti-colonial cooperatives, see chaps. 3 & 4; In post-colonial African states, for example, cooperators associated their work with a tradition of "African socialism" and the concept of *ujamaa*: 140–141; Moulton similarly details how anti-imperial students at the

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Co-operative College in Britain joined cooperative ideology with "a broader critique of colonial political economy." Moulton, "Co-opting the Cooperative Movement?": 427.

70. Kamenov, "Imperial Cooperative Experiments and Global Market Capitalism, c. 1900-c. 1960," 220.

71. A description of how intra-movement politics played out through debates on the cooperative principles over the twentieth century can be found in Ian Macpherson, *One Path to Co-Operative Studies: A Selection of Papers and Presentations* (British Columbia Institute for Co-operative Studies, 2007), 255–76.

72. "George Jacob Holyoake," *The Chicago Times*, October 4, 1882, George Jacob Holyoake Archive (Loose Press Cuttings: America and Canada), Bishopsgate Institute, London.

73. Steve Leikin, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age*, Illustrated edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 2–4.

74. Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*, 2nd ed. edition (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 11.

75. Many textile workers became acquainted with consumer cooperatives through the Sovereigns of Industry, which encouraged industrial workers to organize stores on the Rochdale plan. Howard Haines Turner, *Case Studies of Consumers' Cooperatives: Successful Cooperatives Started by Finnish Groups in the United States Studied in Relation to Their Social and Economic Environment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 48–50.

76. Almost half the Cooperative League's membership by the 1920s came from Finnish-American cooperatives in places like Massachusetts and northern Minnesota, hubs that had been developing for decades. Turner, *Case Studies of Consumers' Cooperatives*, 27.

77. A critique of the transition to "free" labor in liberal discourse can be found in Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2015) 45–46.

78. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, 1st edition (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014), chap. 1.

79. Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 6.

80. Labor scholar Kim Voss quoted in Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, xix.

81. On how agrarian critique "laid the groundwork for the radical republican program," see *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*, 68–70; for contrast with the Rochdale Pioneers, see 120–121.

82. Ibid., 104.

83. Ibid., 138.

84. For details on sabotage against cooperatives in the nineteenth century, and the particular violence Black cooperative organizers faced, see Jessica Gordon Nembhard, "African American Cooperatives and Sabotage: The Case for Reparations," *The Journal of African American History* 103, nos. 1–2 (2018): 71–74. https://doi.org/10.1086/696361.

85. Birchall notes the transition toward consumers' cooperation within the International Cooperative Alliance had taken place by 1907. Birchall, *The International Co-Operative Movement*, 46.

86. In correspondence, CLUSA outlined three primary criteria for membership: one, member, one vote; limited rates of return on shares or borrowed capital; and patronage dividends. "Letter to St. Xavier College," February 11, 1919, Box 1, Fol. M, Cooperative League of the U.S.A. Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

87. James Peter Warbasse, *The Co-Operative Consumers' Movement in the United States* (Co-operative League of America, 1919).

88. For details on the role of labor organizing and socialist politics in consumer cooperatives in Massachusetts, see Turner, *Case Studies of Consumers' Cooperatives*, chaps. 3-5; on Minnesota and Wisconsin, see chaps. 7, 15.

89. Midland Cooperative Wholesale, "Unit II: Principles and Practices in Consumer Cooperation" n.d., Box 3, C. Jack McLanahan Papers, 1927-1963, Wisconsin Historical Society.

90. On the racial, gender, and class politics of producerism in American cooperative ideology, see Leikin, *The Practical Utopians*, chap. 2

91. Turner, *Case Studies of Consumers' Cooperatives*, 14.

92. Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*, 123; On the evolving relationship between producer and consumer cooperatives in the US context, see Steven Leikin, "The Citizen Producer," in Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda, eds., *Consumers against Capitalism?: Consumer Cooperation in Europe, North America, and Japan, 1840-1990*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), chap. 3.'

93. Warbasse, *The Co-Operative Consumers' Movement in the United States*.

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94. Because employee stock ownership programs often accompanied "open" shops and other efforts to repress trade unions, Julia Ott notes that workers regarded employee ownership in general with "extreme suspicion." Julia Ott, "What Was the Great Bull Market? Value, Valuation, and Financial History," in *American Capitalism: New Histories*, ed. Christine Desan and Sven Beckert (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 74.
95. The Cooperative League, "Cooperative League to Engel & Litsky," February 19, 1919, Box 1, Fol. D-G, Cooperative League of the U.S.A. Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
96. Warbasse, *The Co-Operative Consumers' Movement in the United States*.
97. Curtis Haynes, "From Philanthropic Black Capitalism to Socialism: Cooperativism in Du Bois's Economic Thought," *Socialism and Democracy* (New York) 32, no. 3 (2018): 138.
98. Du Bois' collaborator Walter Matney specifically cited Black land loss and trade union discrimination in making the case for consumers' cooperation. W.C. Matney, "Exploitation or Co-Operation?," *The Crisis* 37, no. 1 (1930): 11.
99. W. E. B. Du Bois, "W.E.B. Du Bois to George Streator," April 17, 1935, Box 76: 10, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
100. For example, Du Bois' *The Crisis* and Marcus Garvey's *The Negro World* circulated through African missions. For details on Black internationalism and cooperative thought, see Windel, *Cooperative Rule*, 37–38, 83–84.
101. George Schuyler, "The Young Negro Cooperative League," 1932, Co-Operatives Operatives and Consumer Education, 1930-1975, Fol. YNCL (1930-1933), Ella Baker papers, Sc MG 630, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.
102. Irvin Hunt, *Dreaming the Present: Time, Aesthetics, and the Black Cooperative Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 101.
103. Stuart Chase, "The Story of Toad Lane," Box 10, Fol. 5, C. Jack McLanahan C. Jack McLanahan Papers, 1927–1963 Wisconsin Historical Society.
104. "Something New Under the Sun," ca. 1935, Box 3, C. Jack McLanahan Papers, 1927-1963, Wisconsin Historical Society.
105. George Schuyler, "To the Members of the Y.N.C.L," n.d., Co-Operatives Operatives and Consumer Education, Fol. YNCL (1930-1933), Ella Baker papers, Sc MG 630, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library.
106. "Something New Under the Sun."
107. Mulqueen, "Constituting the Co-Operative: Law and the Political in the History of the English Co-Operative Movement," 35.
108. Walton, "Revisiting the Rochdale Pioneers," 222.
109. Peter Gurney argues the perception that cooperatives were apolitical led to their neglect by prominent Marxist historians, including E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. Peter Gurney, "Heads, Hands, and the Co-Operative Utopia: An Essay in Historiography," *North West Labour History*, 1995, 10.
110. On the settler colonial implications of European commons in North America, see Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Reprint edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 230.
111. My argument here aligns with Gurney's observation that the push to organize consumption "had more to do with changes in the capitalist mode of production than with any loss of vision." Gurney, *Co-Operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930*, 17.
112. Quoted in Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 86.
113. For an exemplary discussion integrating commons and cooperatives in the contemporary "solidarity economy," see Maliha Safri et al., *Solidarity Cities: Confronting Racial Capitalism, Mapping Transformation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2025), chap. 3.

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