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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Adam-Max Tuchinsky. *Horace Greeley's New-York Tribune: Civil War–Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. xv + 312 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4667-2.

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Published on H-CivWar (June, 2011)
Commissioned by Matthew E. Mason

Old Whigs Never Die; They Just Fade Away . . .

Adam Tuchinsky's book muddles up some of the most trusty categories deployed by historians of the nineteenth century. After reading this book no conscientious professor will be able to casually hold forth as usual about staples like free labor, liberalism, and the ideological thrust of the Republican Party. To these this book does something akin to what Daniel Rodgers did nearly two decades ago for the concept of republicanism: Tuchinsky pushes historians to reckon with the wooden categories they use to meet interpretive needs in their own work. While finding clarity and coherence in past people's ideas lends clarity and coherence to monographs, it often masks the "polyglotism" and ruptures that hide behind ideology and party platforms. Tuchinsky brings to light these tensions within free labor by asking fellow historians to take the nineteenth-century sphinx, Horace Greeley, and his *Tribune*–the most powerful paper of the day–seriously.[1]

Even with Eric Foner's more recent concession that the concept of free labor was more fluid and ruptured than he first allowed in his groundbreaking *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, Tuchinsky insists that scholars continue to paper over the profound contradictions and "amorphousness" of the Republican Party and antebellum political ideologies. Directing some of his criticism at Sean Wilentz's recent award-winning tome on the American political tradition, Tuchinsky writes that the "search for cohesive party ideologies is fundamentally flawed; ideological differences within parties were nearly as stark as the differences between them" (p. x). But in a strange way, Tuchinsky parallels the sins he hopes to correct: he overstates the coherence of post-Foner literature (where historians have supposedly overstated the coherence of political parties).[2] Still, tracing political traditions like a proud descendant traces his bloodline, historians have too often assumed legitimacy and continuity without uncovering the family secrets of incest, black sheep, foundling wheels, and fisticuffs beside the Thanksgiving table. Parties reflect shared values and communities; but they also lump together people who disagree fiercely about social and cultural crises at hand. As Tuchinsky sees it, the widest of tents was found within in the Whig and Republican camps. And the crisis of labor, more than any issue, divided the parties.

If the Whig and Republican parties of the Civil War era were the political antecedents to laissez-faire liberalism, historians have failed to reckon with this strange reality: Greeley and his sheet consistently gravitated toward socialist ideas. "Not exactly anticapitalist," the *Tribune* nonetheless spurred "one of the first popular discussions of socially democratic liberal principles in the history of the United States" (pp. x, 2). The *Tribune* regularly questioned the ways in which capitalism aggregated money and power into the hands of the few. Developed in the pages of the *Tribune,* part of the core of free labor ideology significantly challenged capitalism.

Tuchinsky uses Greeley and the *Tribune* to illuminate the central question on Americans' minds during the Civil War era: in a world rapidly changing in response to a market revolution and rising industrialism, "how should labor be organized?" (p.1). The author chronologically moves from node to node: from the 1830s to the end of Reconstruction; from Fourierite reforms and "associationism" in the 1840s to Transcendentalism; from the European revolutions of 1848 to the "free love controversy" and debate about divorce, marriage, and domestic divisions of labor in the 1850s; from the homesteading movement and origins of the Free Soil Party to the sectional crisis and the emergence of the Republican Party; from the Civil War riots to postbellum labor unrest and the demise of Reconstruction.

The most influential ideologue of Whigs and Republicans compiled impressive credentials as a socialist and critic of class interests. Greeley embraced Fourierite as-

sociationism as a way to minimize crass individualism; he consistently sympathized with American and European workers' plight; Karl Marx found his steadiest employment (for nearly a decade) as the *Tribune's* European correspondent; Greeley's paper "probably" gave the first English-language mention of Marxist socialism in America (p. 91); the *Tribune* displayed warm sympathies for the socialist European revolutions of 1848; it embraced land reform, homesteading laws, and limits on speculation as a way to democratize private property; along with other Radical Republicans Greeley pushed Lincoln to place emancipation at the center of the Civil War. Here was a vanguard for progressive change and social democracy.

Yet, as Tuchinsky shows, Greeley's radicalism consistently contained a strong admixture of conservatism–a kind of dithering that holds a special place in American radicalism. Again and again, Greeley stopped short of challenging the establishment. His Whig roots in particular led him to believe in the "harmony of interests," in the fluidity of class lines, and in the sacrosanct nature of private property. Greeley consistently distanced himself from Fourier's ideas about sexual freedom (and bizarre teachings on humans growing tails, and copulating planets). For him, associationism was about labor and universally shared economic opportunity, not upending private relations or property. In the Whig mind, no group needed to be pitted against the other. Greeley hoped that association phalanxes (cooperative Utopian communities funded by investors) would enrich both capital and labor. He hoped to "level upwards," rather than challenge business interests. Also, the *Tribune* supplied Transcendentalism with its largest stage–giving it a voice it never could have achieved on its own. (In the 1840s, Margaret Fuller wrote over 250 pieces for the paper.) Yet, when Fuller directly challenged Protestant individualism, religion, and middle-class culture she had moved beyond the paper's critical boundaries. In 1848, Greeley lauded the revolutions in Europe, using them to critique the "leave-it-alone" laissez-faire platform of the Democratic Party. Yet, he did not support the workers' strikes or class violence; and he increasingly distanced the paper from its more radical correspondents, like Henry Börnstein. Marx may have developed some of his sharpest thinking in the pages of the *Tribune*, but he mocked the "socialist humbug" and eclectic nature of the paper's commitments. For Marx, the *Tribune's* penchant for dabbling with reforms and theory made it a perfect fit for America's industrial bourgeoisie: it was a whirlwind of words that, in the end, asked little of the privileged class.

Still, when compared to Henry Raymond and his *New York Times*, or the Jacksonian laissez- faire political economy, Greeley's flirtations with socialist ideas look rather daring. But if Greeley represented social democratic strains within Whig and Republican ideology, or the "quasi-radical" potential of free labor, his final days bring such radicalism into question. Greeley–the champion of emancipation, black suffrage, and land reform–ended his life as the anointed leader for the Liberal Republicans, a party that embraced most of the things that Greeley had spent much of his life resisting: permanent wage labor, laissez-faire economics, unapologetic individualism, and the soulless nature of a society that reduces human relationships to contractual exchanges and mutual self-interest.

Most boggling, perhaps, Greeley and his party called for the end of Radical Reconstruction. To explain this, Tuchinsky covers familiar territory: the Paris Commune in 1871, the corruption of New York politics and the southern Republican Party, and the radicalization of labor in America. He concludes, as Heather Cox Richardson has, that free labor ideology, tested by the rise of communism, labor unrest, and widespread corruption, led erstwhile champions of black suffrage and Radical Reconstruction to see southern African Americans as part of a larger problem of mob rule and graft. Greeley came to see Radical Reconstruction as the attempt of the dispossessed to use majoritarian politics for their own ends. Instead of seeing free labor as the way for the poor to rise, Greeley and other Liberals came to believe that the poor threatened free labor itself. Labor unrest and graft in Reconstruction-era politics (in Grant's administration, southern legislatures, and Tammany Hall) was of one piece. In a splendid turn of phrase, Tuchinsky sums up Liberals' conflation of southern blacks and working-class immigrants in New York City: "It was, in some respects, the story of how the blacks became Irish (or French)" (p. 204). Instead of relying on determined hard work to better themselves, southern Republicans (especially blacks), Communards, and placemen looked to use democratic processes and corruption to raise their condition.[3] Whereas Greeley once fretted about the ways in which emergent capitalism robbed men of the means and will to improve their station, in his final days he clasped hands with those who blamed struggling whites and blacks for making their own misery.

It is this stranger-than-fiction about-face that puzzles anyone who thinks ideas matter. Tuchinsky helps make some sense of it by emphasizing the conflicting strands of free labor which rallied much of the North, drawing together a patchwork of supporters. Free labor, he repeatedly reminds readers, at once championed widespread

ownership of property and social mobility while another strain of the ideal emphasized contract within a marketplace that rationally measured talent and character. One–which was mostly found in the *Tribune*–promised improvement for all; the other sought to create a society of deserving individuals, both winners and losers (p. xii). Tuchinsky argues that there was never any consensus about what free labor meant before or during the war (p. xii). The heightened rhetoric of the sectional crisis masked the fissures as the binary of free labor/slavery made both categories seem more uniform, less contested from within. Only with emancipation, asserts Tuchinsky, did free labor adherents begin to see how little they agreed. They had built the church only to find they did not share a gospel.

Tuchinsky, who at times seems to root for radical aspects of Greeley, admits his own confusion about the editor's liberal about-face. Several times in the book the reader feels like she's listening to a ballgame on a transistor radio, where high fly balls are painted as just-missed home runs. But the score stays the same. For example, after 1848, Greeley and his paper began to see society as a group of competing interests, and capitalism as the very problem. But the dogged Whiggish belief that an ordered economy and moral education could harmonize interests repeatedly dulled the paper's radical edge. In one of the closing sections entitled, "Liberal Republicanism and the Revival of Whiggery," Tuchinsky explains that "there remained deep within Greeley a reservoir of Whig values" that made him believe that the interests of freedmen and Rebel elite could be harmonized (p. 221). Thus, Greeley rejected the option of confiscating Confederate lands. He even helped secure the release of Jefferson Davis from prison (while most Yankees still howled for blood). In other words, the old Whig in him made him do it.

But this leaves us with the original question of just how radical free labor ideology was. After all, in the end, its most socialist apostle broke bread in the den of laissez-faire capitalism. In fact, as Tuchinsky's work suggests, it was the most fundamental aspects of free labor–self-improvement and mobility–that were put to use for a bald defense of the capitalist order. About the Paris Commune, Tuchinsky writes that "the violence unleashed and legitimized a brand of venomous and austere bourgeois Liberal Republicanism in the United States that, although not unknown before 1870, had mostly lurked beneath more mainstream celebrations of American social mobility" (p. 199). Greeley–who is painted as an anachronism–read from an old script to further a new economic order. "In this new context," writes Tuchinsky, "the *Tribune's* ongoing support for property, self-reliance, and social mobility became almost indistinguishable from the individualistic values that defined the emerging bourgeois industrial order" (p. 211).

For Greeley and his paper, free labor meant "fundamentally, that producers should own the fruits of their own labor" (p. 12). Tuchinsky reminds us that this ideal–shared by the free labor camp–originally drove Greeley to search for cooperative solutions and to challenge the abuses of wage labor. But it seems to have also been the ideological club used by Greeley and Liberals to beat back labor and freedmen. "Fruits of labor" was the ultimate end–not community, cooperation, or social equality. Socialism was not the aim. Greeley, instead, sought to create a deserving society, an obsession shared widely from America's founding fathers to antebellum evangelicals who equated salvation with merit. The core of free labor, perhaps, was self-realization and the reaping of one's own fruits. And at the core of these is the self. Maybe this is what, at bottom, held the sphinx and free labor together.

Cooperation, association, protectionism, homesteading–all these quasi-socialist solutions served the greater end of helping folks get what they deserved. Had Tuchinsky explored this paradox of free labor–self-improvement versus community–he might have been able to better explain the mystery of the liberal turn. Greeley's apparent inconsistency about capitalism need not be so puzzling. The broadly shared commitment to build a society of the deserving–where men rise according to merit, instead of patronage or grace–is a thread, perhaps, that holds together Greeley, free labor, the Republican Party, and much of the nineteenth-century political tradition. Whenever forces–speculators, landowners, voting blocs, political rings, mobs, blacks supposedly seeking handouts, strikers–threatened the myth of unaided individuals working out their own salvation, Greeley adjusted his sights accordingly.

This is a complex book, rich with nuance and analysis. Because of its density, it would not work well with undergraduates. Tuchinsky writes with impressive rigor. At times, though, the historiographical asides fit awkwardly with the narrative. And given that he spends so much time demonstrating the layers and tensions within free labor, it is perplexing that he repeatedly assumes that his readers agree on other categories. Over and again he uses terms with apparently no need to define them for the reader: "loco foco Whiggery," "pragmatic socialism," "social democracy," and, quoting Marx, "Sismondian philanthropic socialist anti-industrialism." This book would, though, benefit specialists and graduate students look-

ing to seriously rethink the Civil War era. Tuchinsky's meticulous analysis invites many promising questions about how ideology works or how long-held ideals (or even moth-eaten ideas) interact with historical contingency. This book makes readers wonder how capitalism–as a system that reflects a narrow group of interests–calls forth, for its own ends, certain voices from polyglot ideologies. It establishes the "divided houses" of liberalism, free labor, and the Republican Party. It also testifies to the power of biography to complicate grand narratives and trusty categories for explaining the past. But for this reader it brings to light a more fundamental question about the American experiment. Like any good Whig, or member of Lincoln's party, Greeley believed in the "ideal of social harmony and individual self-realization"(p. xi). To what degree, I kept asking, do these ideals complement one another? Does maximizing one's potential jibe with social harmony? In this dyad, which is master, which is handmaiden? Is the pursuit of a meritocratic republic–a nation of deserving citizens who enjoy the fruits of their labor–an impediment to a healthy democracy and the common weal? Like all fine history books, this one leaves us with a healthy dose of new questions. I trust that a community of scholars will benefit from the fruits of Tuchinsky's skilled labor.

Notes

[1]. Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: the Career of a Concept," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June1992):11-38.

[2]. See, for example: Mark A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Lause shows how the National Reform Association of New York City melded together radical calls for access to land, socialist critiques of the market, and antebellum reforms. Some of the NRA's leaders would help channel these tangled politics into the Free Soil and Republican parties. Also, Foner's new introduction to his seminal book on free labor admits the ways in which free labor, for different people, encompassed varying degrees of "unfreedom"–from factory wage labor to individual proprietorship. Though he does not emphasize the profound divisions within antebellum free labor as Tuchinsky might prefer, Foner does emphasize how the divisions within free labor ideology were masked by abolitionist rhetoric. Anti-slavery and abolitionist voices increasingly portrayed various forms of labor through the slavery/free-labor binary. With emancipation and Reconstruction, admits Foner, free labor finally split into its competing visions. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xxxii-xxxix.

[3]. Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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Citation: Michael DeGruccio. Review of Tuchinsky, Adam-Max, *Horace Greeley's New-York Tribune: Civil War–Era Socialism and the Crisis of Free Labor.* H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. June, 2011.
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