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Stratified Boston: The Brahmins, the Irish and the Boston Police Strike of 1919

Sarah Block
Bucknell University

Stratified Boston: Class Structure, Ethnic Tensions, and the 1919 Boston Police Strike

by

Sarah M. Block

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Approved by:

John Enyeart, Adviser

Ann Tlusty, History Department Chair

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Boston Police Strike of 1919 through the lens of class struggle and ethnic tension. Through an examination of the development of Boston's class structure, particularly focused on the upper class Brahmins and the Irish working class, it concludes that the Brahmins' success in suppressing the police strike allowed for their maintenance of socioeconomic power within the city despite their relatively small population. Based on their extreme class cohesion resulting from the growing prominence of Harvard University as well as the Brahmins' unabashed discrimination against their ethnic neighbors in almost every sphere of society, the Brahmins were able to maintain their power in Boston's cultural world. The Irish working class, on the other hand, which attempted to use the increasing popularity of public and police unionization to challenge the status and power of the Brahmins through the creation of the Boston Police Union and subsequently through the notorious Boston Police Strike of 1919 was ultimately unsuccessful, and it was left in the same position in which it started, at the bottom of the social ladder. The suppression of the strike by members of the upper class and their allies, particularly those in high government positions, served to preserve and affirm the socioeconomic power of the Brahmins over much of Boston society and brought the era of public police unionization to a close.

Introduction

Boston has long been understood as a city rife with ethnic turmoil and cultural clashes, particularly between the traditional Boston upper class and the immigrant Irish working class. This thesis seeks to explore this topic through the lens of the Boston Police Strike of 1919, in which a segment of the Irish working class, through its connections to the Boston Police Department and through police unionization in general, attempted to challenge Boston's traditional, upper class dominated society. Through the suppression of the strike, the Brahmins successfully thwarted the attempt by this segment of the Irish working class to redistribute social power in a more equitable way, asserting and maintaining the dominance of their own cohesive group despite their comparatively small population.

This thesis examines the Boston Police Strike of 1919 as an essential event in Boston's history because of its role in the reinforcement of the city's elitist, traditional social structure. Beginning with a history of the development of the Brahmin upper class from the city's founding and a narrative of the Irish working class experience through much of the nineteenth century, this thesis will eventually conclude that the strike was an unsuccessful attempt by the Irish working class to manipulate the traditional socioeconomic organization of Boston in order to strip the Brahmins of their disproportionate social power within the city. Though the Irish community, arriving in Boston beginning in the 1830s, had come to be a majority of the city's population by the turn of the twentieth century, the upper class elite still maintained control over culture, government, and socioeconomic life. The premeditated walkout of the majority of the

Boston Police Department employees on September 8, 1919, sparked by the city's refusal to legalize the creation of the Boston Police Union and its subsequent affiliation with the American Federation of Labor, launched the city into a state of chaos and forced people to question the role of class and ethnicity in their city's traditional social hierarchy. Through its suppression of police unionization and public sector strikes, the city's upper class was able to preserve its position of socioeconomic and cultural dominance over Boston's Irish working class for much of the twentieth century.

Though I make the point that the Boston Police Strike was a vehicle used by a segment of the Irish working class to catalyze the class struggle and increasing ethnic tension within the city, I ultimately argue that the story of the strike is one of upper class success. The labor movement and wave of public sector unionization sweeping the nation during the beginning of the twentieth century was utilized by the Irish working class as a convenient way to gain not only better working conditions but also as a way of asserting their rights as a social and ethnic group, using the labor movement to gain much more than mere economic equality; yet, the Brahmins brutally suppressed this action in order to maintain their position of superiority over their ethnic working class neighbors. Just as Irish mine workers in Butte, Montana capitalized on the ethnic homogeneity of the workforce to unify in their fight for better working conditions, the Brahmins, as a uniquely homogenous and cohesive community, came together through their connections to and opinions on the Boston Police Department in order to fight those attempting to

challenge the status quo and the traditional organization of the city.[1] The strike was the culmination of a century-long fight about justice, dignity, and class and ethnic organization within Boston between these two groups, and the elite upper class eventually came out on top of this struggle, asserting their dominance once again.

This angle of investigation will provide a new understanding of the 1919 Boston Police Strike focused on class and ethnicity, specifically the native-born, Protestant upper class, rather than on labor and unionization. As most previous studies of the strike understand it solely as a key event in the national labor movement and the development of the American law enforcement industry, this type of exploration is essential to understanding the larger implications of the strike within its contemporary social context. While class and ethnicity, mostly that of the striking policemen, have been considered by other historians as minor factors contributing to the 1919 events in Boston, they have never been viewed as the underlying, most essential causes of the strike itself nor as influential in the strike's outcome. While I cannot ignore the obvious importance of material grievances as contributing factors to the strike's occurrence, it is not the material aspect of the strike upon which this study is truly focused.

The story of Boston during this era is a complicated one, namely because class cohesion and ethnic group formation resulted from prejudices, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and ultimately the upper class's disproportionate access to power and media outlets as methods of spreading ideas. E.P. Thompson's understanding of class is essential to the understanding Boston's social structure during the beginning of the

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[1] David M. Emmons, "Immigrant Workers and Industrial Hazards: The Irish Miners of Butte, 1880-1919," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 5 no.1 (Fall 1985): 53-54.

twentieth century because of his argument that, "The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time." Class is not something that has a given definition; rather, it evolves from cultural interactions within a given society, not the experience of a single, isolated group at a given point in history. Class is a product of human relationships and common experiences that connect people across geographic and ethnic boundaries. Without group interaction, class identity could not exist for a lack of defining and distinguishing characteristics. Groups need to interact with others in order to cultivate a sense of self as distinct from one another. As many of the Brahmin reactions to police unionization and the 1919 police strike were unquestionably colored by anti-Irish beliefs and prejudices, it is important to understand how these ideas were developed and promulgated throughout much of the city's history in reaction to the influx of and interactions with the rapidly growing Irish immigrant population.

Additionally, an understanding of class can only be gained through a study of groups over time. Class identity changes and evolves as groups and societies develop and relationships among them change; this is particularly important in the United States where steady waves of immigrants began arriving in the 1830s and continually disturbed the status quo, interacting with social and ethnic groups already established within the city. It would be impossible to understand social class without understanding the relationships that have arisen in a given society or the importance that shared economic experiences have in bringing groups together.[2] In Boston, the Brahmin elite and the Irish immigrant working class ultimately developed the strong class ties and class identities

[2] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 9.

which were so essential to the events during the twentieth century through their constant interaction, contact, and conflict.

Similarly, the formation of the ethnic identity of the Brahmins as well as the working class Irish community can only be understood with a similar definition of ethnicity, based on evolution and group relationships. Kathleen Conzen and David Gerber offer this, arguing that ethnicity, like class, is a human construct rather than a natural and immutable fact. Though grounded in real experiences and cultural attributes, ethnicity was created and amplified through relationships between and among groups. It is only through a clash of cultural and historical memories that ethnicity can arise; contrasts between groups are necessary to highlight those similarities within a group that bring people together. Just as class cohesion in Boston came about as a result of the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices against other groups, the ethnic identities of the native-born, protestant Bostonians were enhanced if not created as a result of their interaction with non-Brahmin Bostonians, particularly the Irish working class community. Indeed, interactions between groups are an essential component of ethnic group and identity formation. Ethnicity is not static. It evolves over time, adapting to fit the contemporary social context and experience. An understanding of ethnicity in one time and place will be unavoidably different than an understanding of the same concept in a different location and era. Ethnicity can neither be understood nor develop in

vacuum. Instead, it must be understood through the study of group interactions and relationships.[3]

The views of Thompson, Conzen and Gerber are essential to the study of Boston's various socioeconomic groups in the immediate post-World War I era. It is only with the consideration of these views of ethnicity and class that we can begin to unravel the complicated history of the Brahmins and the Irish, and especially their inextricable involvement with the Boston Police Department, because their relationships with law enforcement and the other Boston groups developed through social interaction and ethnic divisions, two social categories which were often inseparable from one another.

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on class formation, Irish immigration to Boston throughout the nineteenth century, and the cultivation of a cohesive upper class in the city. Without this background, it would be impossible to understand the events of 1919, as they are the result of a century of socioeconomic evolution and changing municipal circumstances. The second chapter details the development of the Boston Police Department and the evolution of American police work with a particular focus on the experiences of Boston's Irish police officers, their unfortunate socioeconomic position, and their interactions with the Brahmin upper class leadership and community, complementing the information presented in the first chapter. At the conclusion of the second chapter, the reader will have a full picture of the situation and sentiments of the wealthy elite and the Irish working class, especially those employed by the police department, in Boston at the close of the First World War. The third and final chapter

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[3] Kathleen Neils Conzen and David A. Gerber, "The invention of ethnicity: A perspective from the U.S.A.," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 no.1 (Fall 1992): 3.

features an exploration of the 1919 Boston Police Strike and the weeks immediately following. It details upper class Boston's aggressive reaction to the unionization of the police and to public sector strikes, providing a unique perspective on the importance of ethnicity and social class to the strike itself, and detailing their unsurprising suppression of the police union's actions. It ultimately explores the nature of the Brahmins' success in asserting their socioeconomic power during a time of explicit challenge to that power, and it illustrates the extreme elitism that the upper class exerted as a method of obstructing, and eventually bringing to an enduring close, the actions of the Boston Police Union.

While the Boston Police Strike has been the subject of previous historic studies, this type of examination has never before been undertaken. There are few, if any, primary sources detailing the ideas and opinions of the police workers and other members of Boston's Irish working class during this era. Yet, a study of the Boston Police Strike from the perspective of the upper class, considering information surrounding the social status and economic circumstance of the Brahmins as well as their firsthand responses and reactions to the strike, can offer a unique understanding of the strike and its effect on class formation and social organization, even with respect to the Irish community. Though seemingly a fight for materialistic gains by the Irish working class, the Boston Police Strike of 1919 was a symbolic struggle for socioeconomic rights and societal fairness that was quelled by the upper class as an affirmation of Brahmin power. With new insight into the social and ethnic history of the city, modern historians and

researchers of all kinds will be able to further their understanding of Boston's role in the development of modern America and Boston's current socioeconomic situation.

Chapter 1: Social Class Formation within the Irish and Brahmin Communities

Boston's class formation took on a different form than that of other American cities as a result of the tension between the upper class Brahmins and the working class Irish community. The social situation at the outbreak of World War I directly resulted from a long history of class struggle and identity formation beginning with the arrival of Irish immigrants to Boston during the beginning of the nineteenth century, and this alteration in the city's population forced other prominent groups within it to reconsider their role in the city's social and economic life.

When British settlers first founded Boston over in the early seventeenth century the population was small and homogenous, but as time passed the homogenous population adapted in order to incorporate arriving immigrant populations and the increasing economic divisions arising as a result of industrialization, or lack thereof. The Irish community arriving in the 1830s upset the status quo by challenging the economic and social balance of the city. At the same time, Harvard University began gaining power and prestige; this allowed the upper class Boston population to utilize its connections to the world of academia to further solidify class identity and cohesively unify itself in opposition to the growing ethnic working class. The upper class Brahmins felt as if they were part of an exclusive society of both wealth and knowledge. Their interactions with others were always colored by this particular worldview, especially their interactions with the Irish working class population. It would be impossible to understand the events of the twentieth century without an understanding of the development of class and ethnic

tension in Boston, particularly that of the Irish immigrant community and the wealthy Brahmin elite.

By the beginning of the First World War, the Boston of the upper class Brahmins was quite distinct from that of the Irish working class. Though both communities seemed to tolerate each other with relatively few public clashes throughout the city's history, tensions between the Yankees and the Irish escalated between 1910 and 1923.

As noted by Brahmin-bred author Cleveland Amory, "The Proper Bostonian did not just happen; he was planned."[4] The elite upper class of Boston developed its own unique culture during the nineteenth century, and this culture of exclusivity came to distinguish the Brahmin class from all others below them on the city's social hierarchy for the following century. Besides a deep belief in order and moderation, the main focus of this society was on propriety.[5] Their collective identity was, and still is in the present day, based on family networks accompanied by wealth. Functioning similar to any European aristocracy, membership in the Brahmin class was gained simply by an accident of birth into one of Boston's prominent families. Name and lineage meant everything, as long as it was accompanied by superiority in both the social and intellectual spheres. The Brahmins believed that they were inherently superior to not only other Bostonians but also those hailing from other places in the country. Due to this Brahmin sense of entitlement, Amory also noted, "Woe to the stranger who gets off at the

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[4] Cleveland Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1947),12.
[5] Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 81.

Back Bay Station, or even one who proceeds to the South Station or the Park Street subway exit, without the feeling that he has come to a shrine."[6]

Before the arrival of the first wave of Irish immigration, in fact during the entirety of the 17th and 18th centuries, Boston's population proved mostly uniform, both ethnically and economically. Officially founded in 1630, Boston quickly grew as a center of business and trade; the city's founders were mostly upper-class merchant adventurers, and the general population followed suit.[7] As time passed, however, the city's opportunities for both crafty entrepreneurs and those seeking employment never substantially increased. Boston's importance as an industrial hub steadily declined with the growth of other coastal cities, particularly New York City, as well as with the development of new transportation technology at the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely the railroad. Massachusetts chartered its first railroad in 1831, and it opened to traffic in 1835. This further decreased Boston's significance as a hub of trade, as the railroads diminished the importance of accessible waterways. When people could easily move and transport goods outside of the city both locally and elsewhere in the country, they began to view Boston as a waypoint, rather than as a final destination.[8]

Boston offered few advantages for entrepreneurs, further increasing the homogeneity of the city's population during this early era by attracting relatively few newcomers as either employers or laborers. Entrepreneurs hesitated to undertake new

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[6] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, 25.
[7] Ibid., 36.
[8] Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1959), 7.

ventures in Boston due to the lack of cheap, available labor.[9] As industry boomed in other Massachusetts cities, Boston had a difficult time matching their success. As a result of the lack of innovation and industrial development in the city proper, few workers successfully found employment in Boston. Not surprisingly, workers shied away from the city in favor of places with an abundance of job openings. Immigrant workers particularly looked to towns developing as hubs of the textile industry, which had been positively affected by the industrial revolution; they merely passed through Boston, seeing it solely as their point of entry into the country and not as a final stop on their pursuit of the 'American Dream.' By 1845, Boston was still a "town of small traders, of petty artisans and handicraftsmen, and of great merchant princes,"[10] and the rest of the country was rapidly advancing beyond Boston, both economically and technologically. This changed very little over the following decades, resulting in a lack of development and lack of economic progress in Boston in comparison to other American cities. By the time immigrants began to arrive en masse, they entered into a uniquely unvaried community with little diversity.

The existence of Boston's twentieth century upper class can be attributed to the few merchants the city was able to attract, mainly those prospering at the very beginning of the 19th century. Though the wealthy elite of Boston, the city's "First Families," prefer to believe that they are descended from the original settlers of the city, their true origins lie with the emerging middle-class of the early 1800s composed of merchant princes who saw enormous amounts of success during this era. The original families settled in Boston

[9] Ibid., 11.
[10] Ibid., 11.

were unable to establish themselves as an economic elite lasting more than one generation because they squandered their fortunes, living as well as possible without saving a penny. These families often found themselves without any substantial amount of wealth to pass on to future generations. Because the fortunes and social standing of the first Boston families died out with the original generation, the Brahmin elite of the early twentieth century had few connections to this initial community; instead, they belonged, and could trace their fortunes, to a class of mercantile elite who acquired considerable wealth by saving money and creating trusts, rising to power during this time. The actual founders of elite Boston are those who were wealthy enough, and forward thinking enough, to pass on an inheritance to their children and grandchildren, creating a class of people whose social status was initially based on the accumulation of money through entrepreneurial ventures and commerce.[11] Later, wealth became just one of many factors contributing to the establishment and maintenance of social status in Boston.

The rise of Boston's merchant princes sparked the rise of a new upper class, and the growing prestige of Harvard University helped to foster a cohesive class identity among this emerging group. Eventually, Harvard helped to cultivate a unique class culture inextricable from the Brahmin world of economic and academic superiority. Because the Boston Brahmins viewed themselves as a class of not just the economically elite but also the culturally elite, they capitalized on the nearby location of the most prestigious academic institution in the country. Though some argue that Harvard was, from the beginning, meant to mirror Boston society, in actuality the development of the

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[11] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, 40.

Harvard University community was an essential factor underlying the creation of this unique social class.[12]

As the city's population became increasingly more diverse, the Harvard community moved in the opposite direction, becoming increasingly more homogenous, allowing the upper class Boston community to further cohere through their ties to the institution. As Harvard began to gain extensive wealth, primarily from private donors living within the Boston city limits, the composition of the student body began to change to reflect the increased economic status of the institution.[13] According to historian Ronald Story, the university gained more students from Boston proper, drawing fewer students from rural New England and more students from Boston's fashionable families. This helped to unify the Boston elite community geographically as well as culturally, as Harvard students came primarily from wealthy families within the same limited social circles. The Brahmin elite began to exclusively send their children to Harvard beginning in the first half of the 19th century. "It was from about 1820 to 1850 that Harvard came literally to be an extended Brahmin family, and Boston "society" a "leech" on the students."[14]

Harvard played an essential role in reinforcing and perpetuating the sense of superiority and exclusivity expressed by the Brahmin community. Not only did Brahmins have an "unusually high regard" for the University and its community, Harvard became a

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[12] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, 294.
[13] Ronald Story, "Harvard and the Boston Brahmins: A Study in Institutional and Class Development, 1800-1865," *Journal of Social History* 8 no.3 (Spring 1975): 98-99.
[14] Ibid., 106-107.

large part of the elite Bostonian's adult life and identity.[15] The high reputation of the university fit perfectly into the Brahmin understanding of a world based on status and prestige. Rising costs and classical admissions examinations, two factors that made admission all but impossible for those who were not members of the city's elite class, forced Harvard to become an exclusionary tool of the elite and reinforced Boston's emerging social class system. In fact, the rise of Harvard helped to create and bolster a more cohesive Brahmin class as a result of the increasing homogeneity of the student body.[16] A Harvard education taught people upper class values while simultaneously distancing and distinguishing these people from the middle and lower classes, namely those without the same educational and cultural opportunities available to them, especially due to the inherently discriminatory admissions system encouraging connections to others with a similar upbringing.[17] Though for some Harvard could offer a passage to the upper class, as those lacking lineage could occasionally use a Harvard degree to alter their social standing, this was relatively uncommon. "Harvard thus became an important stage of socialization, and graduation, a rite of passage and a credential for recruitment in upper-class Boston."[18] By furthering the development of an exclusively elite class of Bostonians, Harvard simultaneously reinforced the position and cohesiveness of immigrant and working class communities in the larger social organization of Boston during this era.

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[15] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians,* 292.
[16] Story, "Harvard and the Boston Brahmins," 109.
[17] Ibid., 111.
[18] Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 17.

At the same time that Harvard and the Brahmins began to cohere and distinguish themselves within the Boston community, Irish immigrants flooded into the socially homogenous city in order to escape the devastation and poverty in their native land caused by the Irish Potato Famine, and they found themselves settling within Boston out of financial necessity. Unlike most other immigrants, who quickly fled Boston upon arrival due to the lack of economic opportunities and the promise of success in other locales, the famine Irish were forced to stay as a result of their inability to afford travel beyond their port of entry. They were also financially unable to live outside of Boston's city limits, particularly in the rapidly developing suburbs as did other groups, due to tolls and fares required to enter and exit the water-locked city.[19] Boston's first electric streetcar line, in fact the first of its kind in the country, began operating in 1889 and allowed easier transportation for commuters living outside the city, yet this simultaneously limited the Irish community's ability to leave the city limits due to their inability to pay streetcar fares.[20] The Irish working class was thus confined not only to the greater Boston area but also within the city limits. The only people that stayed in Boston were those who were much more concerned with escaping Europe than in seeking a fortune in America, and the Irish, alone among the variety of immigrant communities increasingly populating America's cities, fit into this category. By 1855, there were already more than 50,000 Irish immigrants living in Boston, and they soon grew to

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[19] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 91.
[20] "History: Electrification," *About the MBTA,* http://www.mbta.com/about_the_mbta/history/?id=960

become the city's most prosperous ethnic community, clustering together in the most congested sections of the city.[21]

As a result of the economic history of the Irish upon their arrival in Boston, the immigrant Irish working class had an unusually difficult time coming up with the money to buy all of the necessities of life and found themselves in a continual state of poverty, particularly in opposition to the successful Boston elite community. Just as Karl Marx, in his discussion of primitive accumulation, recognized the problems associated with the historical process of separating the producer from the means of production, the Irish had trouble adapting to the lifestyle of the American wage-worker. Almost exactly following the argument presented by Marx in Capital, many famine immigrants had been farmers, and were therefore not used to having to pay for food and other means of subsistence upon their arrival in Boston and conversion into wage-laborers.[22] Similarly, labor historian Herbert Gutman discusses the necessary industrialization of entire cultures including preindustrial white immigrants in the era following 1815, and the Irish

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[21] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 52-53, 109.

[22] Ibid., 86. In Chapter 26 of *Capital*, Karl Marx defines 'primitive accumulation' as the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. The transition from feudalism to capitalism in Renaissance England seems to be the only example of primitive accumulation in its classic form, though Marx suggests that it can and has occurred since then. As the worker undergoes the transformation from producer to wage worker, his understanding of the world is fundamentally altered. As a producer, he has the ability to live off of his land and produce the means of subsistence without needing to enter into the exchange process; yet, as a wage-worker, he must sell his labor power in exchange for wages so that the means of subsistence may be purchased. Throughout the process of primitive accumulation, it is necessary for a person to make the mental transition from self-employed agricultural worker to industrial wage-laborer.

immigrants to the United States needed to adjust to life in a developing industrial society from their primarily agricultural lifestyle.[23]

In order to support themselves, most Irish immigrants turned to, or were funneled into, unskilled day labor as a mere means of scraping by. This type of work, however, did not provide enough to even maintain a family of four. Irish women and children often had to work to supplement a family's earnings, mainly taking jobs as servants in Boston's middle-class homes. Though initially Irish immigrants held the same jobs as other racial and ethnic groups, the occupations into which Irish workers later were channeled generally employed few other minority workers, helping to cohere the community through work while simultaneously creating an Irish sphere of employment in which they alone dominated a variety of industries.[24] This isolated them from other workers and carved a niche in which the city, namely the Brahmin elite, completely relied on the Irish community.

The Irish were also disadvantaged in comparison to other immigrant groups in jobs where community interaction was essential, because other ethnic immigrant groups, particularly the Italians, turned to shop and business owners who spoke their native language. Thus, speaking English as a native tongue, though seemingly an advantage in English-speaking America, did little to help the Irish immigrant community in terms of employment or inter-ethnic community interaction.[25]

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[23] Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *The American Historical Review* 76 no.3 (June 1973): 541.
[24] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 40. Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 61.
[25] Ibid., 63.

As a result of their constant situation of tenuous employment and inability to support their families, Irish workers looked for industries in which, despite low salaries, they would be able to receive a steady wage. Some turned to the care of horses or waiting tables, but many Irish workers found that municipal work offered the type of job security they sought. Because many sought financial security above all else, they continuously chose municipal and government jobs, though considered to be a "financial dead-end," over more risky ventures. Not only did this employment trend widen the gap between the existing Brahmin upper class and the Irish working class, it emphasized the distinctions between the Irish and other immigrant communities in Boston. The few famine Irish that had been successful in rising economically had done so slowly and minimally.[26] Other immigrant groups arriving at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly Southern and Eastern Europeans, rapidly passed the Irish on the economic hierarchy because of their willingness to take business risks for the promise of high rewards. According to historian Dennis Ryan, financial security was a far lesser concern to groups like Italians and Jews than for the Irish, so these groups were more easily steered away from, and less likely to seek out, the dead-end municipal jobs the Irish were more inclined to take.[27]

The Irish community's social situation was marked by its interactions with other Boston communities, native and not. "The concern with status created by the presence of the Irish immigrants and their offspring affected every group in the city. No man now

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[26] James R. Barrett and David R. Roediger, "The Irish and the "Americanization" of the "New Immigrants" in the Streets and in the Churches of the Urban United States, 1900-1930," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24 no.4 (Summer 2005): 5.
[27] Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston Irish, 1845-1917* (East Brunswick, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 14.

could think of his place in society simply in terms of occupation or income level. It was necessary also ever to consider ethnic affiliation."[28] Despite their low income level and generally low economic status, the Irish held a unique position culturally; they were markedly below the Brahmin class despite their relative similarities, namely race and native language, to upper class Bostonians in comparison to other ethnic groups.

The Brahmins, fairly established as a cohesive group by the late nineteenth century, had no trouble keeping the Irish working class out of elite Boston social circles. Native-born Bostonians discriminated against the Irish solely based on their ethnicity. The Yankee elite blocked the Boston Irish from entering "important corridors of social and economic power" like financial institutions, Back Bay clubs, and corporate law firms and the Boston Bar Association.[29] Irish business owners often needed to gain approval of Brahmins in order to obtain credit for their ventures from Brahmin-owned companies; simply because entrepreneurs were Irish, these agents often advised the companies to deny them aid.[30] Elite social clubs like the Algonquin and the Somerset refused membership to the Irish, only increasing their interest in and affiliation with Irish-only groups.[31] The Irish earned a reputation of criminality from the way in which the police responded to them when Irishmen were found intoxicated wandering on the streets. The Irish were often charged with minor offenses or misdemeanors for acts committed while

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[28] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 219.
[29] James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston 1900-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 66.
[30] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 84.
[31] Ibid., 124.

drunk, while others would have merely been given a 'tolerant reprimand' for the same crime.[32]

In contrast to the connections among Brahmins resulting from their socioeconomic circumstances in the United States, the solidarity and feelings of otherness of the Irish immigrant community in Boston resulted from the strong sense of identity based on interaction with other groups back in Europe, particularly the cultural conflict between the Irish and the English.[33] Those who considered England to be their mother country felt as if the Irish, no matter their current country of residence, were culturally isolated from the intellectual influences of large European cities like London and Paris, and native Bostonians were no exception to this, likewise holding this belief.[34] Upper class social activities were inseparable from their cultural activities, and the Brahmins saw the knowledge of culture and the arts as essential to their overall identity.[35] Brahmins generally considered the Irish to be uneducated and uncultured, and treated them with disdain and discrimination.

Likewise, and consistent with the discrimination imposed on the Irish by Boston's elite families, Harvard University openly and unabashedly discriminated against the Irish community. Henry Cabot Lodge claimed that the Irish were an "undesirable addition to the young republic," and the Harvard Lampoon continuously printed comics depicting and reinforcing negative stereotypes about the Irish community.[36] Though students with

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[32] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 121.
[33] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 151.
[34] Ibid., 122.
[35] Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 36.
[36] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 75.

degrees from Boston College were eventually admitted after 1909, the Harvard Law School originally refused to admit Boston College graduates, as the community constantly feared that "Harvard-trained Irish lawyers…could alter the commercial and financial world of Yankee Boston."[37]

Though there were technically educational opportunities available for members of the Irish community, these institutions were still inaccessible to many working class Irish Bostonians. The College of the Holy Cross, founded in 1843, and Boston College, established in 1863, were created solely to take in the educated Catholics excluded by the Harvard community; however, both institutions still charged fees and were unaffordable by those for whom the colleges were founded. All private education, even below the post-secondary level, was too expensive to be afforded by the Boston Irish, and resulted in the lack of school attendance of most Irish children.[38] Even beyond the world of higher education, the Irish were met with educational discrimination through the city's public school system. In fact, many of the New England private schools were created for the sole purpose of "secluding proper Bostonians from the urban multitudes," so that Irish and Brahmin children would never have to interact in an academic setting.[39]

Though most children of the wealthy Brahmin class attended elite ivy-league feeder schools, what Amory labels "socially correct Eastern private schools," public school instruction still fell mostly under the control of the Brahmins particularly through

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[37] Ibid., 95.
[38] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 169.
[39] Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 109.

the course materials.[40] In Americans in Process: A South End Settlement House Story, jointly written in 1903 by employees of the South End House, Robert Woods observed that the Irish in certain districts "do not represent the best qualities of their race," and "have joined the ranks of the permanently poor" due to their non-enterprising personalities.[41] Public schools, through the personal views of teachers and the use of biased classroom materials, encouraged and perpetuated these and other ethnic stereotypes. Textbooks depicted those hailing from predominantly Catholic countries as ignorant and indolent, and specifically labeled the Irish as easily offended and prone to resentment despite their generosity and innate sense of hospitality. In contrast, those with origins in the Protestant countries, particularly England, Germany and Holland, were praised for their intelligence, ingenuity, and industriousness.[42]

Ethnic prejudice by the upper class consistently targeted the Irish of Boston throughout this era despite their rapidly growing population. Even though the Irish made up a majority of public school students by the 1880s, many parents still chose to send their children to private Catholic schools in order to avoid the Protestant and Brahmin indoctrination they felt their children experienced through participation in public education. However, this did little to protect Irish schoolchildren from ethnic stereotypes and discrimination. By constantly reminding students of the "Yankee stereotypes against them" and the mere fact of private education, private Catholic schools only helped to

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[40] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, 299.
[41] Robert A. Woods, ed., Residents and Associates of the South End House, *Americans in Process: A South End Settlement Study* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1903), 56.
[42] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 60.

perpetuate the social inferiority of the Boston Irish community.[43] As a result, few among this community were educated and literate; the Irish working class alone diverged from the norm of participation in Boston's uniquely prevalent intellectual life and community.[44]

Additionally, unlike Brahmins, Irish parents placed little emphasis on extended, formal education, especially because of their reliance on any extra income that could be generated by their children engaging in wage work. This emphasis on work over education often acted as a brake to the social and economic aspirations of their children.[45] Over 1,000 cases of truancy and vagrancy among Irish immigrant children were reported at the end of the 19th century.[46] Thus, it is no surprise that the Boston elite were able to distinguish and elevate themselves based on the claim of Harvard attendance and assumed educational superiority.

Even though by 1900 the Irish were undoubtedly the most populous ethnic group in Boston and that Irish-Catholicism was one of the two most dominant ethno-religious groups, the fact that the Irish were Catholic immediately identified them as outsiders in the Boston community because of the upper class emphasized their strong ties to Anglo-Protestantism, distinguishing them from their ethnic immigrant neighbors.[47] As a result, Catholicism, or rather anti-Catholicism, was the greatest impediment to the assimilation

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[43] Ibid., 71.
[44] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 142.
[45] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 104.
[46] Ibid., 58.
[47] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 17.

of the Irish community into mainstream American culture and society.[48] Catholicism hindered their participation in public educational institutions in an integrated fashion, as Irish parents preferred to send their children to private schools preaching Catholic values. Though they wished to be a part of the greater Boston community, many felt that the public school system taught their children in a biased, nontraditional way, and thus perpetuated their isolation by refusing to participate in the public educational system.

The Brahmins used their religious background as yet another way to distinguish themselves from the working-class newcomers; as Oscar Handlin observed, "In a country that favored whites over blacks, the Boston Irish found themselves in a community that preferred Negroes to Catholic Immigrants," showing that Catholics fell below all others on the Boston social ladder.[49] This is especially notable, given the population of both groups; in a county with a total population of 731,388 people, only 13,886 were reported to be black while 160,865 people were born in Ireland or claimed 2 Irish parents.[50] When Catholicism combined with a socially unacceptable ethnic heritage, it was deadly to one's social aspirations; therefore, Irish-Catholics were stuck at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Since the Brahmins used religion as a uniting factor, the Irish too turned to religion as a method of combating the classism and racism they experienced at the hands of the Anglo-protestant elite.

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[48] Thomas J. Rowland, "Irish-American Catholics and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 15 no.2 (Winter 1996): 8.
[49] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 131.
[50] "1910 – Suffolk County, Massachusetts," Historical Census Data Browser, University of Virginia Library, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/.

While most Irish immigrants were already ethnically Catholic, many turned more devoutly to religion upon their arrival in Boston, fostering a stronger sense of connection to the Irish Catholic community. Though adherence to the Irish version of Catholicism often furthered the isolation of the Irish community from other primarily Catholic immigrant groups, the Irish as an ethnically Catholic community came to dominate the Boston Church in such a way that newer Catholic immigrants, hailing from Southern and Eastern Europe, were unwilling and unable to challenge the authority of the Irish in their religious institutions.[51] For example, most members of the Irish community trusted and turned to the church to get all of their news, including international, national, and even local community news. The Boston Pilot, the predominant news source for members of the Boston Irish community and to this day the oldest existing Catholic newspaper in the United States, was owned and controlled by the Archdiocese of Boston, which became a primarily Irish dominated institution. The paper was commonly known as "The Irishman's bible" and included information not just on community events but also on naturalization processes and employment opportunities, reaching far beyond the regular material covered by more mainstream news sources.[52]

Religious affiliations helped to perpetuate classism and racism targeted at the Irish community because it unfortunately taught them, by example, the benefits of being exclusive and exclusive association with their own ethnic and religious communities.[53] According to historian James O'Toole, "the tenacity of ethnic identity among Boston's

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[51] James M. O'Toole, "The Newer Catholic Races: Ethnic Catholicism in Boston, 1900-1940," *The New England Quarterly* 65 no.1 (March 1992): 119-120.
[52] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box,* 103.
[53] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 133.

Catholics was powerful."[54] The Irish retreated into ethnic enclaves partially as a convenience but also as a way of combating the exclusion they experienced in almost every aspect of life in Boston, including but not limited to the spheres of employment and education.[55] Rather than fighting discrimination through inclusion in more mainstream institutions, the Irish voluntarily excluded themselves from the larger community as a defense mechanism; it was easier to be among a group of similar people who all experienced the same types of discrimination in everyday life. In Boston, the road to a middle-class existence and social acceptance was particularly difficult for the Irish due to the extreme bigotry targeting the Irish and expressed by the elite upper classes.[56]

By the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, Boston was a completely different city than it had been at its founding three centuries earlier, especially in terms of ethnic diversity. Waves of immigration in the late 1880s brought new ethnic groups and social classes into the city, particularly large immigrant groups from Southern and Eastern Europe. By 1895 in the North End of Boston, there only remained as few as 1500 families with parents who had been born in the United States.[57] As a result, the working class Irish acquired some form of security in the Boston community by often acting as middlemen between the Brahmins and the newer immigrants, and suffered relatively little from the competition of arriving immigrants due to divergent industrial capacities.[58] However, the lack of competition presented by the new communities did little to help the

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[54] O'Toole, "The Newer Catholic Races," 133.
[55] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 2.
[56] Rowland, "Irish-American Catholics," 10.
[57] Woods, *Americans in Process*, 42.
[58] Ibid., 121.

Irish to progress. They remained in their previous posts and spheres of employment, as none of the new immigrants competed against them for jobs in those industries. The lack of competition effectively helped to maintain and solidify the Irish's low position on the Boston social and economic hierarchy.

The Boston Irish often defined their group identity based on their relationships with other ethnic groups, as explained by ethnic historians Kathleen Conzen and David Gerber, and by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these intra-ethnic relationships had come to be reflected in the variety of residential ethnic enclaves found across the city. Most importantly and most conspicuously, the Irish voluntarily segregated themselves from the city's steadily growing Italian Catholic population. This segregation changed little over time, and continued well through the twentieth century, at least through the 1970 Federal Census.[59] Just as the Brahmins had been intolerant of the Irish, the Irish were similarly intolerant of new immigrant populations who were seen as "unwelcome interlopers" and often became the victims of petty persecution and discrimination.[60] Despite the discrimination and persecution experienced by the Irish, the Irish were unwelcoming of newer and populous groups. The Irish resented the intrusion of the Italians into their territory, and felt threatened by the large population of new immigrants. They were forced to compete for survival in many spheres of society despite the fact that the Irish had been settled in the city for far longer, as the Irish had been unable to improve their general economic situation since their initial arrival. The Irish

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[59] Nathan Kantrowitz, "Racial and Ethnic Residential Segregation in Boston 1830-1970," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 441 (January 1979): 42.
[60] Woods, *Americans in Process*, 61.

responded to this intrusion in the only way they felt would be successful at scaring the Italians away: by being territorial and utilizing gang violence and intimidation, for which Boston ethnic communities have become notorious.[61] For many, the only way to stay safe was to remain in one's own ethnic ghetto, especially because each section of the city was fairly well defined. In fact, nowhere in the city were there areas in which Irish and Italians were integrated in any appreciable capacity; in districts with some kind of ethnic diversity, the Irish and the Italians clustered together in tenement houses and mini-districts, still adhering to group boundaries. [62]

Despite the fact that some groups cooperated well with the Irish, like the Jews who were begrudgingly respected due to their continual suffering for their religious convictions and way of life, and that second-generation immigrants seemed to get along better than their predecessors, William Foote Whyte observed with regards to the Irish-Italian conflict that "the sentiments of race superiority or inferiority are too deeply ingrained to be decisively changed in two or three generations."[63] Woods observed in his 1903 study of Boston ethnic communities through the South End House that there was little interaction among these groups within the city.[64] In all, the conflict between the Irish and the Yankee-Brahmins as well as the Irish and the Italians persisted well through the beginnings of the twentieth century and the era of the First World War.

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[61] William Foote Whyte, "Race Conflicts in the North End of Boston," *The New England Quarterly* 12 no.4 (December 1939): 626.
[62] Ibid., 630-631.
[63] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 138. Whyte, "Race Conflicts in the North End of Boston," 638.
[64] Woods, *Americans in Process*, 63.

The conditions under which the Boston Irish were forced to live reflected their relationship to other Boston communities both ethnically and economically. Districts of the city housing the Irish working class community grew to be the most congested sections with the highest rents, due to each district's high land values and vicinity to the city's traffic.[65] The South End, West End, and East Boston, notably Irish districts, were characterized by rows of flats along narrow passageways with extremely high rents, while most non-Irish, in contrast, had begun to take advantage of the rise of the suburbs and improvements in rapid transit, moving out to communities boasting better living conditions.[66] The working class Irish were isolated both culturally as well as geographically from other Bostonians, which merely furthered negative stereotypes and images of their community. Though the existence and prevalence of the 'No Irish Need Apply' slogan in classifieds and job advertisements may have just been a myth, especially given the lack of concrete evidence of the slogan's use, the Irish capitalized on the urban legend of its existence in order to increase Irish solidarity and protect community members from further discrimination.[67] Following the Brahmin example of emphasizing the importance of 'family consciousness' as a key to upward social mobility, the Irish tended to stick to their own community and support those with whom they felt ethnically connected.[68]

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[65] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 109. Woods, *Americans in Process*, 138.
[66] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 100-103.
[67] Richard Jensen, "'No Irish Need Apply': A Myth of Victimization," *Journal of Social History* 36 no.2 (Winter 2002): 406.
[68] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, 15.

By the outbreak of the First World War, the economic position of the Irish community, especially in relation to the Brahmin elite, had changed little despite the influx of new immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century upsetting the social hierarchy and economic balance of Boston's community. While the Irish should theoretically have risen in the general social hierarchy as a result of impoverished communities invading their city, the reality is that these immigrant groups rapidly surpassed the Irish both economically and socially. Even though the Irish were fully accepted politically and economically by the end of the nineteenth century, the Irish, as an ethnic community, had progressed very little overall.[69] By the mid 1910s, the Irish, for the most part, still found themselves holding blue-collar jobs. Though the second generation had managed to move upward slightly, many Irishmen still held jobs as dock laborers, freight handlers, and teamsters.[70] Contracting was also a popular field for the Irish. Charles Logue, one of the 235 registered Irish contractors in Boston, famously built much of Boston College as well as Fenway Park, erected in 1912.[71] By 1905, almost half of the undertakers in Boston were of Irish ancestry.[72] There were a few Irish who held jobs as substantial shopkeepers, yet most who had been skilled artisans or mechanics had left the city limits and relocated elsewhere due to relative economic success.

In comparison to other ethnic communities, the Irish still had the lowest incomes in the city by the start of the twentieth century. The rate paid to laborers in city departments was lower than the salaries earned from other jobs, and even within

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[69] Jensen, "No Irish Need Apply," 419.
[70] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 217.
[71] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 87.
[72] Ibid., 89.

municipal industries the Irish earned less than their non-Irish, ethnic counterparts. The Irish earned approximately two dollars a day, while other groups like the Italians made about five or six dollars a day on average.[73] By the beginning of the twentieth century, "The mass of Irishmen continued to occupy the low places in society they had earlier held. Their wives and daughters performed most of the city's domestic service; and men and boys of Irish ancestry constituted the bulk of unskilled workers."[74]

Though there was an immense social tension and uneasiness between the Brahmin upper class and the Irish working class during this era, it was not always overtly manifested in daily life. Most middle and upper class Bostonians that employed servants preferred to hire servants of Irish descent. For example, the Gibson family, an upper-middle class family living at 137 Beacon Street in Boston's Back Bay, maintained a total of seven servants throughout the Progressive Era; six of the seven live-in servants were Irish immigrants.[75] The servants kept by Edwin Curtis, the Commissioner of the Boston Police Department during the first decades of the twentieth century, kept four servants, three of which were born in Ireland.[76] The city's most prominent families almost universally preferred the Irish to those from other ethnic communities, and the proper Bostonians knew that they could not survive without the Irish, though they were still seen as unquestionably inferior to the Brahmin community.

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[73] Woods, *Americans in Process,* 130-131.
[74] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 216.
[75] Kyla Tornheim, "Tour Highlights," *Gibson House Museum Guide Manual/Interpretation Plan*. Boston, MA. Revised November 2005.
[76] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 8, Suffolk, Massachusetts, Roll T625_742, Page 1B, Enumeration District 241, Image 830.

Even though Boston's upper class and the Irish working class coexisted in peace within many domestic spaces, these interactions often served to increase, rather than diminish, tensions between the two groups. The 'Irish servant girl' stereotype persisted in Boston for many decades, and helped to increase and perpetuate the rising distrust of the Irish community at large. Many Bostonians regarded these women as servants of the Pope, due to their devotion to Catholicism, and their presence in the finest homes of the city generally made the Brahmins uneasy.[77] Because these women were often the only Irish with whom the Brahmins regularly interacted, Irish immigrant women unwillingly served as ambassadors and representatives of the entire Boston Irish community.

Despite a variety of setbacks, the one industry in which the Irish were able to succeed and prosper in a very public way, advancing even beyond the Brahmin community, was municipal politics. By the 1890s, one-third of the Irish families in the North and West Ends of Boston earned their primary income from a family member involved in the political arena.[78] By the mid 1880s, the first man of Irish origin, Hugh O'Brian, was elected as the Mayor of Boston, and other famous Irishmen like James Michael Curley and John F. Fitzgerald, the maternal grandfather of President John F. Kennedy held the position for the following decades.[79] The First Irish congressman from Boston, Patrick Collins, was elected in 1884.[80] Many of the Irish who had been able to work their way through the system of higher education found themselves working in

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[77] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 185.
[78] Woods, *Americans in Process*, 121.
[79] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 18. Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 97. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 84.
[80] Ibid., 18.

politics, using the legal profession as their door to success. Many historians, including Dennis P. Ryan, have understood the Irish community's failed attempt to progress and succeed in Boston culture and society as the result of their unmatched success in the realm of politics and the Boston labor movement.[81] In fact, the progressive politics gaining popularity in the first decades of the twentieth century handicapped working class activism and power, as organizations representing only a particular segment of the working class, like, "unions and workers' associations, could not easily act as the voice of a unified community."[82]

Just as the Irish controlled Boston's municipal government, by the mid 1910s members of the Irish working class community almost completely controlled the Boston labor movement, giving the Brahmins yet another reason to unify in opposition to the increasingly cohesive Boston Irish working class. The Boston Central Labor Union (BCLU), a parent organization and umbrella body of many of the local craft unions in Boston, was an Irish run affiliate of the American Federation of Labor.[83] In fact, not just the leadership but also the membership of the BCLU was primarily Irish. They were mostly politically well connected and indeed often found themselves pushing for and successfully aiding the passage of labor reforms and legislation.[84]

While members of the Irish community seemed to hold many of the most prominent government positions, the majority of the Boston Irish lacked a significant mount of political power. The most isolated groups in the new political system were

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[81] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box,* 106.
[82] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 117.
[83] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 142.
[84] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 36.

undoubtedly working class ethnic communities, and it is into this category that most of the Irish fell, with no personal connections to the centers of political power.[85] Despite the number of Irishmen involving themselves in politics and the legal world, most members of this community remained fairly insignificant. Though the first Irish-born member of the Suffolk County Bar joined in the 1840s, only six of the 65 judges appointed to the superior court and one of the 28 appointed to the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts between 1865 and 1913 were of Irish descent.[86]

Because of these strong public affiliations of many Irish Bostonians, the Yankee and the Irish immigrant communities came to tolerate each other without truly living in harmony with one another. While the Yankees continually pushed progressive reform and government restructuring in order to end Irish machine rule, the Irish, who controlled the city government as a result of these types of reforms, and the Yankees were able to cooperate out of political necessity.[87] While cooperation between groups may have given the rest of the world the appearance of mutual respect between the ethnic and native communities in their varying realms of cultural control, the cooperation was the result of the ability to tolerate each other while staying at arms length, respecting each spheres of influence without imposing on the other group's power.[88] While earlier Brahmins may have accepted democratic institutions and the Irish community's rise to power within them, the second and third generation Brahmins and their descendants grew increasingly

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[85] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 131. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 91.
[86] Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box*, 91.
[87] Ibid., 91.
[88] Ibid., 28. Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 225.

bitter toward the Irish working class, condemning not only technology but also immigration, labor unions, class conflict, socialism, and the city in general.[89]

Even though the Irish community had become much more organized by the World War I era, Boston's Brahmin society was much more unified than the Irish community and harder to penetrate than ever before. Because many wealthy Bostonians had moved out to developing suburbs like Brookline and Milton, the Brahmin elite left within the city limits consolidated themselves geographically and increased the intensity of their community ties due to the exclusive character of the remaining population.[90] Generally, the rich and educated of the Boston community, mirroring the rich and educated in the rest of the country, neglected the poor and mostly ignored their existence with the exception of during election season; this allowed the Brahmins to create a cohesive community that interacted little with surrounding and local ethnic communities, only further isolating the Boston elite.[91] Proper Bostonians were extremely loyal to their own and attached to their fellow Brahmins, "follow[ing] them blindly because he knows they rose to the top naturally," and turning their leaders into a type of institution.[92]

After the 1880s, most Brahmins were able to make a living in the sphere of investment banking, rather than industry.[93] Though they no longer ruled industrial or political life in the city, the Brahmins still ruled "the museum, the academy, the dinner table, and the club," which made cultural understanding an essential characteristic by

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[89] Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 120.
[90] Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, 221.
[91] Ibid., 222.
[92] Amory, *The Proper Bostonians*, 315.
[93] Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 91.

which the Brahmins could distinguish themselves.[94] By the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Brahmins had so entrenched their ideals and identity into the class structure of Boston society that it was nearly impossible to successfully challenge the existing traditions and framework by which Boston was organized.

As a result of the establishment of clear social and economic class distinctions between the Boston Brahmins and the Boston Irish coupled with, and intensified by, the increasing unification of these divergent and opposing communities, "The perception of increasing ethnic harmony would fade, to be replaced in less than two decades by a new story of long-standing conflict that formed the context in which local group identities took shape."[95] By the end of the First World War, Boston was on the road to disaster. The Boston Police Strike of 1919 would prove to be the culminating event in the century-long escalation of ethnic tensions in Boston and a fervent attempt to restructure society based on population rather than tradition.

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[94] Ibid., 109.
[95] Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism*, 38.

Chapter 2: Police Work, Public Unionization, and the Boston Police Department

The beginning of the twentieth century was a crucial era in the history of the Boston Police Department, often referred to as the beginning of the era of police professionalism. The most notable of the many administrative changes the Department underwent gave the newly created position of Boston Police Commissioner a tremendous amount of power, and the transformation of the department into a modern institution heightened tensions between the ethnic employees of the police department and the upper class communities that they were required to protect. A series of municipal leaders with little to no understanding of the people composing Boston's population transformed the police department into a classist institution, while members of Boston's working class rapidly began to join the growing national movement to organize public employees as a method of combating their increased social and economic marginalization within Boston's society. The First World War changed how varied American communities understood each other, particularly within the context of patriotic loyalty and national identity, and contributed to the heightened tensions among Boston's ethnic and native communities. The issue of public sector unionism, particularly police unionization and the creation of the Boston Police Union, and the eventual occurrence of the Boston Police Strike exposed the world to a clash between upper class Boston Brahmins and their immigrant, working class neighbors that had been in constant opposition for almost a century.

As detailed by urban historian Eric Monkkonen, American policemen only began to assume the primary role of urban crime control in the late nineteenth century. In fact,

police forces as we now know them did not exist until fairly recently. Until the mid-nineteenth century, there were no organized police organizations or crime-fighting institutions; the only existing posts resembling police work were as night watchmen and constables who worked directly under the court systems. Based on the British model, early American policemen were meant to act as a cross between a military and civilian force, responsible to both civil and criminal courts and meant to raise alerts about fires and criminal acts committed throughout the city. The modern police system only came into existence as a result of the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Force in London in 1829.[96] Shortly afterward in 1837, the Boston Police force was organized and created as a fulltime professional force, sparked by a series of anti-Irish nativist riots and general social unrest.[97] "Compared to their British predecessors," Monkkonen asserted, "the new police in the United States envisioned their role as keepers of public order, dispensing summary justice immediately on the street."[98]

Originally, these early police forces had militarized hierarchies, which made them efficient and reliable due to the effectiveness of the chain-of-command system. These new systems were also put under the control of the executive branch of most state governments, in contrast to the previous system that had given the state legislature control over law enforcement. The Massachusetts General Court placed the Boston Police Department under the control of the executive branch of the government in 1885, and the department then began to be governed by a three man Board of Commissioners appointed

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[96] Eric H. Monkkonen, "History of Urban Police," *Crime and Justice* 15 (1992): 549.
[97] Bruce C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labor: The Police in American Politics," *Theory and Society* 3 no.1 (Spring 1976): 92.
[98] Monkkonen, "History of Urban Police," 557.

by the governor.[99] They were required to work with the municipal leaders, particularly the mayor, yet the mayor himself had no control over the appointment of police department leadership. Because of this change in power and organization, the police were able to shift their focus from civil court activities, mainly preparing and prosecuting cases, to criminal watch and public safety.[100]

Many of the functions of the new policemen were even unexpected by the original creators of these forces, reaching far beyond the sphere of crime prevention. Police patrolmen found themselves acting as city servants, taking in lost children, enforcing sanitation laws and taking annual censuses.[101] Police also dispensed forms of welfare for which the government took no responsibility, such as caring for the disabled and the homeless, by providing free lodging to those in need. Many station houses contained dormitories to house overnight lodgers, mainly prostitutes or the homeless, though this type of lodging was often inadequate and considered improper according to the moral standards of the time.[102] Even though the city built four new station houses in 1912 in order to remedy the problem of overcrowded stations, which affected both policemen and prisoners who were jailed in cells lacking proper lighting and ventilation, most station houses in Boston were still considered unfit for habitation.[103] A 1909 investigation into

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[99] Frederick Manuel Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1966): 10.
[100] Monkkonen, "History of Urban Police," 550.
[101] Ibid., 554.
[102] Ibid., 555.
[103] Ibid., 18.

work conditions provided concrete proof of unsanitary conditions in Boston station houses; they were dirty, decrepit, and often infested with rats.[104]

The new police forces also had required uniforms, which, though a seemingly insignificant detail of police work, distinguished them greatly from earlier pseudo-police forces. Uniforms made officers visible on the streets, and therefore publicly recognizable by all citizens. Though these uniforms, called 'popinjays' in Boston, were originally hated by all and seen as an infringement on Americans' freedom to wear whatever they wished, they increased citizen access to patrol officers as well as centralized control over officers, as uniforms made officers easier to locate on city streets.[105] The increased visibility of the new uniformed police forces was additionally believed to deter criminals from illegal activity. As a result, city governments were required to devise a new system of paying law enforcement officials as previously, patrolmen were paid a commission for catching offenders. Once policemen were required to prevent crime, rather than merely catch active criminals, the police needed to be paid a regular salary out of the city budget.[106] Because of the new and unavoidable strains on municipal finances due to changes in police work, most American cities did not adopt uniformed police forces until after 1850, and American cities seemed to do so in order of population size and necessity. Additionally, growing intolerance of riots and public disturbances of the peace sparked the rapid adoption of police forces across the country.[107] The sudden surge in crimes

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[104] Richard L. Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," *The New England Quarterly* 20 no.2 (June 1947): 148.
[105] Ibid., 551.
[106] Ibid., 551.
[107] Ibid., 553.

related to property theft was yet another important reason for the creation of modern urban police departments and detective bureaus.[108]

Though often not obvious, much of the Boston Police Department's activity was motivated by social class and economic status. By the 1890s, police forces were fairly established in most American cities. Though they looked out for the safety of the people on their beats while simultaneously enforcing state and city statutes, it often seemed that the police were an instrument of the upper classes, as upper class neighborhoods and residents were often in the public eye through government connections or society columns. However, this upper class control of the police tended to come about for other reasons. Because patrolmen tended to respond to the demands of large and influential groups within their beats, policemen tended to act in favor of middle and upper class interests. Stillman S. Wakeman, a patrolman for the Boston Police Department's Division 13 in West Roxbury Village, noted in his official journal that late nineteenth-century residents of Boston believed that the police department's principal job was to protect private property.[109] Patrolmen were often called upon to "discipline rowdy youth who threatened private property, neighbors who behaved in unacceptable ways, and recent immigrants whose alien culture provoked antipathies."[110] Policemen were called upon by citizens, mostly businessmen and homeowners, to control and suppress the activities of gangs of boys notorious for smashing windows and setting fires. While van Hoffman claims that it was the behavior of the offending citizens that provoked wealthy citizens to

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[108] Alexander von Hoffman, "An Officer of the Neighborhood: A Boston Patrolman on the Beat in 1895," *Journal of Social History* 26 no.2 (Winter 1992): 312.
[109] Ibid., 312.
[110] Ibid., 310.

submit complaints to the police, one cannot deny that these people saw the offenders, usually from the blue-collar working class, as a threat to their property and to their wealth, and therefore to their social standing should these thing be stripped away from them.[111] Additionally, the police helped to maintain the social equilibrium that upper class Bostonians had worked so hard to maintain since the seventeenth century. Usually done through corruption and bribery, the police made alliances with immigrant gangs to prevent warfare and street disruption. In order to follow through with middle and upper class requests for peacekeeping and general vigilance in their residential areas, it was necessary for the police to create alliances with the gangs that were often believed to be the source of chaos and street disturbances. This was all done for the sake of the appearance of a stability favored by the Brahmins, though it merely suppressed the tensions between classes within the city.[112]

Police patrols were organized around foot beats, during which one officer would be assigned to the beat per shift.[113] These patrolmen walked their beats alone, and helped to "forestall crime, recover stolen property, prevent disorder, and provide other services."[114] An 1893 manual for the Boston Police Department stated that patrolmen were required to know their routes perfectly, examine the entryways to homes and stores to make sure that they were secured, rid the sidewalks of loiterers, and keep an eye on

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[111] Ibid., 314.
[112] Jonathan Randall White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy: The Boston Police Strike and the Ideological Origins of the American Police Structure* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University, 1982), 93.
[113] Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Police Organization in the Twentieth Century," *Crime and Justice* 15 (1992): 59.
[114] Von Hoffman, "An Officer of the Neighborhood," 309.

suspicious characters.[115] Additionally, they were supposed to keep order, detect fires, and "scrutinize any illegal or immoral activity." Their instructions were limited, and often left open to interpretation by the officers on the beat. By telling officers that they were constantly supposed to be watching for people who disregarded contemporary social mores and appeared suspicious, mostly people whom the upper classes were afraid or by whom they felt threatened, the patrolmen became far from impartial, biased by both their socioeconomic status and that of their superiors.

Patrolmen acted as versatile officials of the neighborhoods in which they were stationed. Patrolmen were expected to constantly be moving, walking along their routes and never standing in one spot. In order to remedy the previous lack of discipline on the force, the Boston Police Department required patrolmen to call their stations from call boxes along their routes. In this way, superiors could supervise police officers to more of an extent than in the past. Indeed, as time passed the police force became more paternalistic and more strictly managed. Patrolmen worked seven days a week with a fourteen-day annual paid vacation. Those on day duty worked from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and those on night duty, typically newly hired and lower ranking officers within the department, worked from 6 p.m. through to 8 a.m.[116]

Despite their ties to many wealthy middle and upper class communities, as a division of the executive branch and paid out of the municipal budget police workers were almost universally poorly paid and rigidly supervised. The Boston Police Force was no exception, even after it underwent an unparalleled number of Progressive reforms at

[115] Reiss, "Police Organization in the Twentieth Century," 59.
[116] Von Hoffman, "An Officer of the Neighborhood," 312.

the beginning of the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century, cities had tried to regulate scandalous behavior, marked as scandalous according to upper class values, by creating "semilegitimate vice districts" without actually legalizing practices like prostitution and gambling. Because of the general acceptance of these districts even by law enforcement, local entrepreneurs and those controlling vice operations often easily swayed the policemen who were assigned to control and regulate activities there. Bribery was common. Policemen had a tendency to give-in to corruption as a method of controlling these semi-legal activities, and this type of behavior reflected poorly on police departments as a whole.[117] As progressive reformers were rampantly trying to eliminate corruption and scandal from American cities, reform within municipal police departments seemed a logical place to begin to attack the problem. The Irish had been extremely successful in the political arena, and by the late nineteenth century Boston's municipal government was almost completely controlled by members of the Irish community. John F. Fitzgerald, elected mayor in 1905, truly believed, "the Boston Irish could legitimately inherit the reigns of the Boston government."[118] Many middle and upper class Bostonians believed that the restructuring of the police department, as well as the broader restructuring of the entire municipal government, as a way to end Irish machine rule in Boston.[119] Urban police reform was so closely tied to the political history of every city that changes in police organization often went hand in hand with the pursuance of a variety of other political and humanitarian goals, usually those favored by the upper

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[117] Monkkonen, "History of Urban Police," 565.
[118] James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston 1900-1920* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1998), 103.
[119] Ibid., 91.

classes.[120] Jacob Riis, famed muckraking journalist and photographer, like many others, believed that police reform would lead to honest government; for many, this meant government returned to the hands of elite, native-born, white, protestant Americans.[121] By keeping an eye on the police, the wealthy elite could exert at least some control over the immigrant working class in a world in which immigrant populations were steadily becoming more populous and powerful.

The centralization of police agencies into a structured bureaucracy was a method by which many believed that inefficiency and corruption could be removed from police departments, especially because centralization would simplify the relationships between lower ranking officers and their overseeing organizations.[122] "Although their descriptions of the exact means used to control the police tend to be imprecise, most historians assume that centralized downtown command posts in the city government and police department bureaucracies directed the police," and this was so in Boston.[123]

One of the most important ways in which the Department was changed was with the 1906 replacement of the three man Board of Commissioners by a single, and all powerful, Commissioner who cooperated with the city's mayor, traditionally also member of the Boston Brahmin community.[124] It was through this change that Stephen O'Meara, former journalist and public activist with no political training, came to assume

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[120] Reiss, "Police Organization in the Twentieth Century," 57.
[121] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 101.
[122] Ibid., 4-5.
[123] Von Hoffman, "An Officer of the Neighborhood," 309.
[124] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 11.

the post of Boston police commissioner.[125] He understood the importance of the police department to the city's overall welfare, and completely revamped the law enforcement system to ensure its effectiveness and glitch-free operation. O'Meara standardized the methods of appointment of officers and promotional procedures, making the process much more rigorous and centralizing the matter of promotion in his own hands as police commissioner.[126] Centralization in this way additionally helped to ensure that police officers were loyal to the police command, consisting of middle and upper class men, rather than to their ethnic and political groups, though the office of police commissioner still had obvious political ties and this change did not always have the desired effect.[127]

O'Meara also attempted to change the way in which police officers acted on the job, as well as how they responded to those they encountered while on duty, as an attempt to get these men to exemplify upper class values and visions of society. He tried to eliminate the violence that had frequently been associated with the police prior to his reign by teaching officers to respond to violence and verbal abuse in a calm, collected way. In 1912, he outlawed the use of the billy-club, an instrument which was very often misused and only perpetuated the image of the violent, lawless policeman. In the period from 1906 to 1916, there was a 93 percent increase in arrests, and the force itself grew enormously in the twelve years of O'Meara's tenure.[128] By 1918, O'Meara had made the Boston Police "one of the most lawful in the country," having successfully transformed the Department into an "effective, efficient, law-abiding and corruption-free

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[125] Ibid., 13.
[126] Ibid., 17.
[127] Reiss, "Police Organization in the Twentieth Century," 70.
[128] Ibid., 23.

organization."[129] In fact, during this era Boston saw the least amount of scandal and controversy in comparison to other large American cities like New York and Philadelphia.[130]

Despite minor improvements and honest attempts at police reform, employees of the Boston Police Department still found themselves lacking decent working conditions and overall fairness in the workplace throughout the beginning of the twentieth century. Commissioner O'Meara was so concerned with establishing the Boston Police Department as a model of efficiency and modern policing that he tended to overlook the demands and desires of the men he employed.[131] Koss argues, "In short, O'Meara's work suffered from his administrative myopia which kept him from seeing the larger picture – namely, that the enduring success of his programs rested on his men, and that their devotion and loyalty had to be kept alive by assuring them a decent standard of living and working conditions that would sustain their professional pride."[132] The hierarchical system which had ensured efficiency in the department, simultaneously obscured the insistent needs for reform and improvement.[133] In essence, O'Meara had created an administration full of "bureaucratic rigidity."

Even more significantly, the position of police commissioner had developed into a "virtual autocrat" and held absolute power in a variety of situations, allowing him to be influenced by his class and ethnic affiliations. Because he was not bound by civil service

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[129] Ibid., 20.
[130] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 18.
[131] Ibid., 22.
[132] Ibid., 25.
[133] Ibid., 21.

listings, the Commissioner had the power to promote anyone he wanted, as long as they had passed the police examination.[134] For example, the police administration was granted arbitrary powers, which undermined any advances made by labor activists. Because there were few requirements for advancement and promotion, the system and its promotional procedures were "grossly unfair" and subject to the whims and desires of the Commissioner and the higher-ups in the Department. The subjective judgments of superior officers and administrators were allowed to enter into the promotional process as biases and favoritism, and were unchecked by any other departmental regulations.[135] For example, the Police Commissioner agreed to give employees a 24-hour holiday for every eight days of work, except this time off could be taken away at will by the Commissioner himself. Patrolmen were expected to work a regular day shift of 73 hours or and 83 hours night shift, often working up to 17 hours a day.[136] During World War I, policemen's workload reached an all time high as a result of the combined hours required by a combination of police work and tours of duty for the federal government.[137] With this extreme power placed in the hands of the Police Commissioner, the patrolmen were continuously subject to his abuse of power. Boston Police Commissioners took such advantage of their position of power that patrolmen, primarily members of the Irish community, were subjected to horrific station conditions, minimal salaries, and continuous overwork, and they were granted no effective outlets for expressing their

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[134] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 149.
[135] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 10.
[136] Joseph E. Slater, *Public Workers: Government Employee Unions, The Law, and he State, 1900-1962* (ILR Press: Ithaca, 2004), 25.
[137] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 24.

grievances. The office of Police Commissioner used its power to squeeze as much work out of the employees at the smallest cost to the Department, and each Commissioner was able to manipulate the force to further their personal goals and to the benefit of any group favored by the man holding the position.

While it became increasingly easy for the Police Commissioner to abuse his power and make the lives of his employees more difficult, the material conditions of the worker decreased as a result of a rising cost of living and the inefficient reform of the wage system within the Boston Police Department. In the time between 1898 and the end of the First World War, the cost of living in Boston rose a shocking 106 percent, mostly as a result of Boston's booming wartime munitions industry and numerous shipyards drawing large amounts of income and an influx of labor into the city. [138] Patrolmen were required to work for six years in order to earn the maximum possible salary, working on a graduated pay scale. During their first year, they were given the title of "reserve men" and paid only two dollars a day, and their second year they were given a raise of a mere 25 cents. From there, they were promoted to the post of "patrolman," and were paid an annual salary.[139] Though they were granted a raise in 1898, the wage increase was not put into effect until 1913.[140] Even with a general raise in the Spring of 1919, the first in six years, patrolmen were only earning $4.38 a day, or half as much as a carpenter and a whole 50 cents less than municipal transit workers. Policemen made only $1,100 a

[138] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 150.
[139] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 3.
[140] Slater, *Public Workers,* 25.

year.[141] On top of their miniscule salaries, patrolmen were additionally required to buy their own uniforms and equipment, things without which their job could not be done properly. In the year 1919, policemen were required to devote $207 to such equipment required by their job.[142] In the end, the unlimited power granted to the Police Commissioner coupled with the patrolmen's inability to change their material working conditions under such a bureaucratic system would lead Boston's police patrolmen to illegal unionization and strike, seen as the only method by which to improve their situations.

Just as attempts at reform had failed to rid the department of power abuse and misunderstanding by the police administration, conditions improved little for employees of the Boston Police Department, despite attempts at reform, as a result of the primarily Irish employee base. The Boston Police Department had a unique tie to the Boston Irish community, especially because of its connection to the municipal government in Boston. American police departments in general have been important employers of immigrants, yet the Irish were the most notable group influenced by police work. Interestingly, the ability to appoint people to the position of Boston Police Commissioner was put in the hands of the governor mainly as a method of in combating, rather than administering, the Irish "takeover" of the Boston municipal government.[143] Yet, the police department somehow managed to survive as an Irish dominated organization. Even in southern cities and cities dominated by non-Irish ethnic populations, the Irish seemed to dominate

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[141] Francis Russell, "Coolidge and the Boston Police Strike," *The Antioch Review* 16 no.4 (Winter 1956): 404.
[142] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 4.
[143] Russell, "Coolidge and the Boston Police Strike," 404.

municipal police forces.[144] Due to the steady and reliable nature of police work, the Irish tended to feel comfortable in that occupation no matter their population size or geographic location.[145] The Boston Police Force, too, was primarily composed of men of Irish descent. Of the nineteen patrolmen who were heavily involved in the leadership of the Boston Police Union, at least four were born in Ireland and another four patrolmen were second-generation Irish immigrants.[146] While there had already been rampant stereotyping of Irish communities throughout the United States prior to their complete domination of the ethno-political scene, the Irish, in their particularly visible positions as government employees and law enforcement officials, seemed to perpetuate stereotypes merely by acting as a presence on city streets. People of all classes came into constant contact with Irish immigrants outside of their homes, and they relied on them for protection and safety in their daily lives. This created an interesting dilemma, in that a single interaction between a citizen and a police officer can influence their perceptions, as well as the perceptions of their friends and relatives of the police department in its institutional entirety.[147]

When O'Meara stepped down from his position as Boston Police Commissioner, the issue of Irish domination of the police force suddenly became crucial to the course of Boston history as a result of the new Commissioner's non-Irish background. In 1919, Edwin Upton Curtis was appointed as Police Commissioner when Stephen O'Meara

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[144] Monkkonen, "History of Urban Police," 560.
[145] Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959), 62.
[146] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1910 and 1920.*
[147] Andrew Goldsmith, "Police Reform and the Problem of Trust," *Theoretical Criminology* 9 no.4 (November 2005): 454.

stepped down from the post. Curtis was strikingly different from his predecessor, and these differences eventually helped to increase the developing chaos within the Boston Police Department because he was unable to relate to or understand the people above whom he worked. At the time of his appointment, he was 57 years old. He was born in Massachusetts, as were both of his parents. He had had two daughters with his wife Margaret, both teenagers during the 1910s, and the Curtis family continually kept a variety of servants.[148] He graduated from Bowdoin College and went on to practice law for two years before becoming interested and involved in politics. In 1906, he was appointed by President Roosevelt as the Assistant U.S. Treasurer at Boston, and went on to hold a variety of governmental posts in the following years.[149] Having held the post of Solicitor of Boston within the government, as well as holding the title of youngest mayor the city of Boston ever had at the young age of 34, he seemed an appropriate choice to succeed O'Meara due to his previous involvement in municipal government.[150]

Unfortunately, however, Curtis had little experience with police departments and a limited understanding of police affairs, especially with regard to the people employed by the Boston Police Department.[151] Unlike O'Meara, who was a Canadian immigrant of Irish descent despite his membership in Boston's upper class, Curtis had few qualities connecting him to the vast Irish majority of Boston's population. In politics, and in life, "Curtis personified the Boston Brahmin…He had inherited wealth, Republicanism, and 'a

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[148] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 8, Suffolk, Massachusetts, Roll T625_742, Page 1B, Enumeration District 241, Image 830.
[149] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 43.
[150] Russell, "Coolidge and the Boston Police Strike," 405.
[151] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 129.

profound faith in the divine right of the propertied classes ultimately to rule.'" He had an advanced education which immediately set him apart from the majority of Boston's population. He epitomized everything the Irish and ethnic working classes were not, and as a result was often considered to be an anachronism in the political scene because of his traditional ties and beliefs.[152] He was seen as a "stern, uncompromising autocrat."[153] He understood those outside of his social class little, and, as a result of his ignorance, he was never able to anticipate any of the events that would occur during his reign as Police Commissioner.[154]

He had a particular disdain for the Irish community because of their domination of the Boston municipal government, which undoubtedly colored his interactions with the primarily Irish Boston Police Force. Growing up, the Brahmins, the ruling class in every aspect of Boston society, and had been so since the late eighteenth century. When the Irish began to gain power, especially political power, Curtis, like many in his social position, felt threatened. He saw Boston as the upper class intellectual utopia it once was, and was unable to accept the changing demographic realities of the city without resentment. As a result, he "despised this new emerging group with its alien religion and its eye for political plunder," and truly believed that the only way Boston could return to its golden age, the Boston he so idealized, was by eliminating all Irish influence from positions of power in the city government. One of the primary reasons he accepted the position of Police Commissioner was to assert some control over the Boston Irish

[152] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 43.
[153] Silver, "Prelude to an Interpretation," 44.
[154] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 152.

community, and he unabashedly treated the employees of the police department as uncultured and power hungry foreigners threatening the reign of the only legitimate rulers of the city.[155]

Many holding powerful positions in the municipal government felt a similar hatred and lack of understanding toward the Boston Irish, and this was evident in their dealings with police employees. Of these people, the most significant and influential were the Boston police commissioner, the governor of Massachusetts, and the mayor of Boston.

Calvin Coolidge, the governor of Massachusetts elected in 1918, was similarly unable to relate to the employees of the Boston Police Department as a direct result of his stereotypically Brahmin upbringing. He was born in the state of Vermont, as were both of his parents, and he went on to become a well-respected lawyer residing in Hampshire County, Massachusetts. He had a wife and three children.[156] Before being elected as Governor, Coolidge had been the President of the Massachusetts State Senate and had held a number of other posts at the state level.[157] He was considered to be a "puritan democrat, steeped in the traditional Calvinist beliefs of the sanctity of private property and the high worth of honest work and saving," making him particularly unsympathetic towards the immigrant poor. He generally favored an increase in the scope of governmental activity and feared the spread of radicalism; with little support for

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[155] Russell, "Coolidge and the Boston Police Strike," 405.
[156] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 2, Hampshire, Massachusetts, Roll T625_705, Page 6A, Enumeration District 163, Image 587.
[157] Thomas B. Silver, "Prelude to an Interpretation: Coolidge and the Historians," (Ph.D. diss., Claremont, 1980): 74.

socialism and socialist reforms, Coolidge was a true believer in the idea that with an increase in productivity and business prosperity inevitably comes the improvement of working conditions.[158] Coolidge was also notorious for his passive and mild-mannered personality. Described as "thrifty not only of money but also of speech and of unnecessary action," Coolidge tended to let events run their course and intervened only when absolutely necessary.[159] Despite that, he had a reputation for firm and courageous decisions, and was absolutely committed to the rule of law. He spent most of his time working 'behind-the-scenes,' accumulating power and influence slowly and out of the public eye.[160]

Calvin Coolidge suffered from the what historian Frederick Koss refers to as socio-politico myopia, embodying a narrow-minded outlook on society making one unable to understand those outside of one's one socio-political group. For Coolidge, this meant that the only people with whom he felt connected were those with a similar socioeconomic upbringing and ethnic background. He was often considered to be an ineffective leader because of his inability to govern a city of people with whom he at little in common. Like Curtis, who also suffered from Koss's socio-politico myopia, Coolidge was completely unable to understand the temper and actions of the employees of the Boston Police Department because of their ties to the ethnic working class community, a community with which Coolidge was absolutely unfamiliar.[161]

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[158] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 210.
[159] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 154.
[160] Silver, "Prelude to an Interpretation," 76.
[161] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 337.

The Mayor of Boston also suffered from a similar "myopia." Andrew J. Peters, though not necessarily anti-Irish, did little to encourage harmony and reconciliation between the Brahmins and their Irish neighbors. When he assumed the position of mayor in 1918, he became only the second non-Catholic, or Yankee, to hold the position of mayor in the period between 1884 and 1918.[162] He was 46 years old, married, and had three young sons.[163] Like Coolidge, he exemplified the best of upper class Boston. Peters was of colonial descent, came from a family with much inherited wealth, and attended Harvard with the rest of the Brahmin community. In fact, many of the old Bostonians saw him as a "sign of the city's redemption from the Celts. He was in the Social Register. He was wealthy enough to be personally honest."[164] Those of Boston's upper class believed Peters would save them from Irish rule of the city, similar to the earlier belief that police reform would liberate Boston from Irish domination.

A defining characteristic of Peters, which set him apart from other Brahmin politicians, was that he somehow stood outside of the "Bay State Federalist tradition," and politically labeled himself as a Yankee Democrat.[165] Although he was personally honest, this was not so in his professional life. He was particularly inept at city administration, earning him a reputation of being "neither emotionally nor intellectually equipped for the staggering job of administering a polyglot community such as Boston." He was highly influenced by ward bosses, appointing people they suggested to high posts

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[162] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 102.
[163] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 20, Suffolk, Massachusetts, Roll T625_739, Page 13A, Enumeration District 536, Image 1187.
[164] Russell, "Coolidge and the Boston Police Strike," 406.
[165] Ibid., 406.

in his administration, and he was often so trusting of their opinion that Peters would sign documents without even reading them.[166] Thomas Silver went so far as to claim that Peters is usually remembered as "a playboy, a part-time mayor, and a womanish man who at the moment of greatest danger to his city showed himself to be weak, frightened, and hysterical."[167]

The First World War changed how Americans, and likewise Bostonians, viewed themselves and their communities and affected how communities within urban settings interacted among themselves. In fact, America's experience with the war completely altered how Americans viewed the role of government, the economy, and national identity. Though the war did not destroy the Progressive movement which had characterized the first decade of the twentieth century, it did effectively end most American reform movements.[168] The war was "revolutionary in nature." It smashed people's idealistic and old-fashioned values, and America's involvement in such a large-scale international conflict broadened people's horizons and expanded the possibilities of what could come to fruition within their own borders.[169] Throughout the duration of the war, management and labor had artificially found harmony through government regulation, and many, like Elisha Friedman, a statistician in the War Finance Corporation, felt that it was possible to maintain this harmony following the armistice.[170] After the war, many Americans believed that they had ensured that the world was a place in which

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[166] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 105-106.
[167] Silver, "Prelude to an Interpretation," 44.
[168] Ibid., 8.
[169] Ibid., 4.
[170] Ibid., 42.

democracy could prosper and rule, and they constantly looked for ways to ensure that the democracy they had created was maintained and intensified.[171] Some believed that the growing upsurge in radicalism threatened the democracy the United States had fought to defend during the First World War, and the government acted in response to this supposed threat by creating anti-radical policies and programs that were enacted nationwide. Many Americans wholeheartedly worked toward resolving disputes and viewed the United States an example of democracy and happiness for the rest of the world, and in order to do this it was necessary to suppress labor activity and minimize any opposition to traditional American norms.

In Boston, as in the rest of the country, the ethnic affiliations so central to people's social identities quickly evolved into patriotic affiliations and ties to their newly formed American identities. Native Bostonians felt threatened by the idea of the foreigner, and began to view immigrants and those they considered to be un-American as a threat to not just American society but to the very foundations of America's democratic way of life. Bostonians, like most Americans, became hypersensitive to their community ties and channeled their uneasiness into Americanizing those they considered to be the biggest threat to their homogeneity: immigrants.[172] Because immigrants in general were viewed as an anti-American group despite the extreme diversity among immigrant communities, Boston soon became much more divided along class lines rather than ethnic lines. What had previously been a struggle between native Bostonians and the Irish

[171] Ibid., 8.
[172] Ibid., 116.

soon evolved into part of the larger class struggle occurring across the country, pitting the Brahmin elite against the a segment of the working class.

By 1919, many immigrants nationwide felt that the only alternative to deportation was assimilation, thereby eliminating many of their ethnic and political ties in favor of creating a conglomerated unified working class. Since the American elite, the Boston Brahmins included, generally believed that the key to maintaining America's status in the world was to "Americanize" immigrants, especially those who could challenge democracy by preaching "radical notions" tied to their alien origins, many ethnic communities quickly tried to prove their loyalty to the United States and to American ideals.[173] Yet, many Irish often openly showed their animosity towards Bolshevism and communist movements as a method of proving their Americanism, as shown through Boston-based working class publications. The Boston Labor World, the official newspaper of the Irish dominated Boston Central Labor Union, continually printed advertisements warning against Bolshevism and eliminating any rumors of affiliations with such movements. For example, a full-page advertisement in March 1919 entitled "Against Bolshevism" read, "Standing firmly united under the torch of Liberty, American Capital and Labor are mutually resolved to brook no interference in their common interests by the destructive forces of Bolshevism…the hostile torch of Bolshevism must be kept from our shores."[174] In July 1919, the Boston Labor World made clear yet again that the American labor movement had absolutely no affiliation to the recent revolution in Russia, reading:

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[173] Ibid., 118.
[174] "Against Bolshevism," *Boston Labor World*, March 5, 1919.

> Since American Labor has helped make the world safe for Democracy, it can be depended upon to make it safe from Bolshevism… American Labor will tolerate no ism that conspires and plots to undermine American Industry...Men who conspire and plot and who lend a ready ear to Bolshevism are marked by American Labor, and when the hour is ripe American Labor will drive them out.[175]

The fear of Bolshevism exhibited by the upper classes of Boston was appropriated by the Irish working class community as a method of distancing itself from any rumors of radicalism and anti-Americanism.

Though the Irish had a difficult time overcoming their associations with the Catholic Church, especially because many had heard rumors that American Catholics had taken an oath to be loyal to the Pope over all else including the United States, they were able to use their contributions to the war effort as a way to again prove their true allegiance to the United States.[176] They saw World War I as an opportunity to prove their loyalty, patriotism, and bravery while winning the approval of other Americans.[177] By 1919, upper class Americans wanted security from foreign influence and radicalism, and they believed they had found this through the perpetuation of an intense American nationalism.[178] Foreign ethnics and immigrants who remained in the United States following the war believed it was their duty to prove their commitment to American

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[175] "Making the World Safe," *Boston Labor World*, July 19, 1919.
[176] Thomas J. Rowland, "Irish-American Catholics and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 15 no.2 (Winter 1996): 9.
[177] Ibid., 25.
[178] Burl Noggle, *Into the Twenties: The United States from Armistice to Normalcy* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1974), 101.

democracy. [179] To many members of the working class, this meant a commitment to equality and justice in the workplace, and the ethnic working class fought hard to ensure this type of localized democracy despite the fact that this struggle ultimately deepened the division between the upper and working classes.

Even though the struggle for workplace equality became much more publicized following the end of the First World War, Boston and the United States more broadly already had a long history with the labor movement and public unionization by this time. Public employees had begun to organize in the 1830s, yet opposition to their organization did not begin until the 1880s when the postal workers began to create local unions.[180] In fact, until the end of World War I, public unions enjoyed relatively few barriers and were often successful in their endeavors. In 1906, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) created its first national union specifically for government workers; the creation of the National Federation of Post Office Clerks began to increase interest in public sector unionization, and opened workers' eyes to the possibility of organized labor in government industries.[181] Immediately following this and as a result of the increased realization of the power of public sector labor unions, the country saw a variety of public sector strikes at the beginning of the twentieth century. In New York City, Street cleaners and garbage and ash collectors struck in both 1906 and 1911.[182] Unaffiliated public

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[179] Conzen, Kathleen Neils, and David A. Gerber. "The invention of ethnicity: A perspective from the U.S.A." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 53.
[180] Slater, *Public Workers*, 16.
[181] Joseph Slater, "Public Workers: Labor and the Boston Police Strike of 1919," *Labor History* 38 no.1 (Winter 1996-1997): 8.
[182] Slater, *Public Workers*, 17.

unions struck across the country as well, beginning even before the turn of the century; an unaffiliated police union in Ithaca, NY went on strike in 1889, and another in Cincinnati struck in 1918.[183] This type of public unionization ultimately inspired other government employees to seek union charters and to utilize strikes and walkouts as a method of protest, particularly due to their unprecedented success rate. It was not unreasonable for police workers to expect the same types of protections within the law enforcement industry, especially after watching other public employees achieve so much in this arena.

Policemen in Boston had sought some type of organization and outlet for united action beginning in the late nineteenth century, yet their only success had been the creation of the Boston Social Club. In response to the demands of workers calling for a union of Boston policemen, Stephen O'Meara had established the Boston Social Club in 1906 as a crucial part of his overhaul and reformation of the entire Boston Police Department.[184] Designed as a fraternal group for the lowest-ranking police officers rather than as a traditional union, it spanned across precinct boundaries uniting police workers across the city.[185] It was generally ineffective as an outlet for the workers, however, because the Boston Social Club was still completely under the control of Commissioner O'Meara, and later Commissioner Curtis, and the Boston Police Department. Acting as nothing more than a social club, the organization was an "ineffectual instrument…incapable of bringing about reforms."[186] John McInnes, later President of the Boston Police Union, called the Boston Social Club "a week-kneed organization,

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[183] Slater, "Public Workers," 11
[184] Slater, *Public Workers*, 25.
[185] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy,* 115.
[186] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 26.

controlled by police officials." Department officials fixed elections, ignored the club's requests, and even assigned Club representatives to less desirable duties within the Department. Unsurprisingly, given the Department's stand on strikes and radicalism, one of the duties assigned as a punishment to those heavily involved in the Boston Social Club was called "strike duty," during which their sole job was to monitor and suppress striking workers throughout the city.[187] The Boston Social Club was mainly intended as a way to keep police workers complacent and allied with business, and many members of the upper class believed its creation was a crucial step in the prevention of true police unionization.[188] Due to the lack of understanding of those employed by the Boston Police Department, Brahmins in the government expected patrolmen to be content with the Boston Social Club and stop demanding real change, even though the workers were able to gain very little from the organization. The Boston Social Club had been thoroughly "throttled by headquarters and emasculated by departmental red tape,"[189] and workers began to become agitated by their lack of power and few opportunities to initiate change. Though Curtis had attempted to pacify police workers by creating grievance committees of elected officials in each station house, by the end of World War I police workers remained without a union or any other organization through which they could truly air their grievances and have any hope of creating reform.[190]

Public union organizations across the country began to grow so rapidly that the government responded by formally recognizing the right of federal workers to organize,

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[187] Slater, "Public Workers," 16.
[188] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy,* 119.
[189] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 34.
[190] Ibid., 35.

despite the limitations still imposed on public employees. The Lloyd-Lafollette Act, officially recognizing that public workers had a formal right to organize, was passed in 1912.[191] It paved the way for public sector unions across a variety of industries; however, groups like the postal workers were still prohibited from joining unions and asserting the right to strike.[192] World War I helped to increase the number of public workers that were organized, especially because of the "enlarged role of the state in the war-time economy." Also, the increased number of Americans working in wartime industries put many more workers in the position of holding a public sector, federal job; in fact, approximately 9 million Americans were employed in war-related industries in 1918.[193]

In Massachusetts, where early twentieth century police unionism would eventually meet its doom, public sector strikes were unusually commonplace. Workers struck in both the Charlestown Navy Yard in 1914 and at the Watertown arsenal in 1911 over Taylorist methods, and Boston carpenters struck in 1918. Outside of the state capital, public sector strikes were just as common as within the city. Springfield garbage and ash collectors staged a massive walkout in 1917; the same industry saw similar walkouts in Lawrence, Lowell, and Newburyport. In April 1919, 20,000 employees of the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company, which was under the control of the government, went on an illegal strike for six days.[194] By the time the Boston Police Department went on strike, they assumed that this method of protesting their working

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[191] Slater, *Public Workers,* 19.
[192] Anne M. Ross, "Public Employee Unions and the Right to Strike," *Monthly Labor Review* 92 (March 1969): 14.
[193] Slater, "Public Workers," 9.
[194] Ibid., 14.

conditions and demanding change would be successful and indeed cause few disruptions within the everyday functioning of society.

The next step in the public unionization movement was affiliation with a national labor organization, ensuring legitimacy and national recognition and support. Public sector organizing increased exponentially during the war, and as it grew, more and more unions sought affiliation with the AFL in particular. The American Federation of Teachers was created in 1916, and the National Federation of Federal Employees was formed a year later. The National Association of Letter Carriers, which had been originally founded in 1889, as well as the Railway Mail Carriers affiliated with the AFL. In 1918, The International Association of Fire Fighters was founded. The AFL believed that public employees were "members of the working class who shared values and aspirations with private sector employees." [195] In general, the American Federation of Labor helped these unions to fight for the same things as employees in private sector unions, primarily collective bargaining rights and improved wages and hours.[196]

By the end of World War I, the labor movement in Boston was in a precarious position, attempting to win and ensure rights of the working class, which had been done in Boston for decades before, while simultaneously being persecuted by upper class Bostonians and government officials for assumed radicalism and anti-democratic policies. American society was suffering a general chaos as a result of the war, and the year 1919 was a year of "red scare" and "unprecedented militancy by workers."[197] The

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[195] Ibid., 8.
[196] Ibid., 9.
[197] Slater, *Public Workers*, 30.

war may have brought many advances to organized labor,[198] yet those gains came at a steep price. The year 1919 saw more strikes than ever before, involving over 4,160,348 workers;[199] Massachusetts alone saw 396 strikes, the most in a single year since 1887 when records began to be kept.[200] Generally, these strikes were dealt with and tolerated, one of the reasons the Boston police workers did not foresee the massive struggle which occurred, yet the reason these strikes were relatively uneventful was because they did not seem to threaten the stability of business and the economy. Rather, the Boston Police Strike of September 1919 questioned the status quo and the role of the police in relation to the economic upper class, a characteristic that distinguished this strike from previous police strikes.[201] This was especially so, as the police were seen as symbol of order, at least to the upper classes, in a society wrought with disarray.[202] The police workers wanted to establish themselves as members of the working class majority, deserving of the same rights and privileges as other workers in both the public and private sector had successfully done, yet the police were a necessary component in the maintenance of stability and democracy that the police strike threatened.

The question and issue of police unionization offered Americans with a challenge somewhat separate from the issues of other types of public unionization. Over the years, the police had been known as labor opponents, frequently being called upon to break

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[198] Noggle, *Into the Twenties,* 66.
[199] David Montgomery, "The "New Unionism" and the Transformation of Workers' Consciousness in America, 1909-22," *Journal of Social History* 7 no.4 (Summer 1974): 516.
[200] Slater, *Public Workers*, 30.
[201] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 19.
[202] Ibid., 75.

strikes or attack worker protests.[203] Even though the police had evolved into a true career rather than a mere "political plum" by the end of the First World War,[204] many people were hostile towards the idea of unionizing the police due to their frequent anti-union actions.[205] When a police group in Cleveland had attempted to organize and applied for a union charter from the AFL in 1897, the AFL told them that organizing policemen was akin to unionizing the military, and the trade union movement cannot organize a group "controlled by forces inimical to the labor movement."[206] Though the police patrolmen saw themselves as a body unified through class and ethnicity, the AFL and members of the upper class often viewed the unionization of police as contradictory to the role of policemen within a society.

Yet, after observing the lack of opportunities for police unionization and receiving numerous applications for union charters from police departments around the country, the AFL voted at their June 1919 convention to begin issuing charters to police unions upon the receipt of a proper application.[207] Police Departments began submitting requests for charters in outrageous numbers; the AFL almost immediately granted charters to 37 locals spanning 21 different states.[208]

Despite the many official restrictions and prohibitions against police unionization which were imposed in Boston, many Boston police officers felt that the only way to achieve better working conditions and improve their general standard of living was to

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[203] Ibid., 10.
[204] Monkkonnen, "History of Urban Police," 557
[205] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 59.
[206] Slater, "Public Workers," 10.
[207] Ibid., 38.
[208] Slater, *Public Workers*, 20.

unionize in affiliation with the American Federation of Labor, especially because of the complete failure of the upper class and administration controlled Boston Social Club. The patrolmen involved in the Boston Social Club met on August 1, 1919, and at this meeting they created the Boston Police Union. A secret vote was held to determine if the newly formed union would apply for an official charter from the AFL, and the patrolmen unanimously voted, unanimous due to the fact that only 940 of the 1544 patrolmen participated in the voting, to affiliate with the AFL.[209] On August 8, 1919, the Boston Police Union wired for a charter, and the AFL granted them an official union charter on the following day.[210] The first meeting of the Boston Police Union was held on August 19, 1919, and from then on the Boston Police Union became a target of the government and an institution which, in the eyes of the upper classes, needed to be eliminated immediately because it threatened the community which the members were paid to protect.[211]

Many members of Boston's Brahmin class believed that public sector unionization would disrupt essential services provided by the government, and that police work is one of the most essential government services.[212] Police unionization would jeopardize the trust the general citizenry had gained in the police as a result of progressive police reforms, as trust will inevitably be lost once the law enforcers, those meant to ensure that citizens are acting in accordance with law, are immune from these same legal policies they are charged with enforcing. If police were allowed to unionize

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[209] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 155.
[210] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 46.
[211] White, "A Triumph of Bureaucracy," 156.
[212] Ross, "Public Employee Unions," 15.

and strike while other groups were continuously suppressed by the government and the police, they would be blatantly showcasing the hypocrisy of the Brahmin police officials.[213] Police Commissioners everywhere seemed to welcome unaffiliated police organizations, yet felt threatened by the idea of a police union affiliated with the AFL because it might sacrifice the "independence" of a police department. They worried about divided loyalty and favoritism when unionized police would be required to handle strikes, because they might be less likely to follow orders from the government, and therefore the upper class, if they were allied with other organized workers.[214] Additionally, as Goldsmith claims "police officers are, by function, training and experience, suspicious," police unionization would threaten the control and power the Brahmin leadership had over their ethnic, working-class police force.[215] In the eyes of many, it would be impossible for those responsible for policing radicalism to become those who needed policing. The Boston Police Strike was a method by which the police workers looked to improve their working conditions while simultaneously upholding American ideals, yet most upper class Bostonians saw their fight as a simple disregard of duty, democracy, and respect for traditional social organization.

The Boston Police Department, like police departments and city administrations in many other locales, was officially mainly opposed to any type of non-company unionization because of a fear of hostility and usurpation by the ethnic working class of the Brahmin controlled institution. In 1918, Police Commissioner Stephen O'Meara

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[213] Goldsmith, "Police Reform," 453.
[214] Slater, "Public Workers," 12.
[215] Goldsmith, "Police Reform," 453.

issued a statement that rumors of AFL affiliation were likely to injure the efficiency and reputation of the Boston police force.[216] Only a month after the AFL began granting charters to police unions, on July 19, 1919, Boston Police Commissioner Curtis issued a General Order stating his disapproval of the national movement to organize municipal police forces.[217] Ten days later, he issued Rule 102 to reinforce his previous statement; this asserted that union membership was completely incompatible with police duties and necessarily compromised the impartiality of the police department.[218] Then, on Monday, August 11, 1919, Curtis issued General Order 110, often viewed as the immediate catalyst and most important document pertaining to the imminent Boston Police Strike. Explicitly prohibiting the unionization of Boston policemen, it stated:

> It is or should be apparent to any thinking person that the police department of this or any other city cannot fulfil [sic] its duty to the entire public if its members are subject to the direction of an organization existing outside the department. It is a well recognized fact that a police officer is not an employee but a state officer. He is charged with impartial enforcement of the law under the direction of a commissioner who is himself a statutory officer. The following rule interferes in no wise in a policeman's interests and activities as a man and citizen. It does, however, forbid him, and the department from coming under the direction and dictation of any organization which represents but one element or class of the community…the following is hereby added to and made part of Section 35 of the Rules and Regulations and designated as Section 19 of said rule: No member of the Force shall join or belong to any organization, club or body composed of present or present and past members of the Force which is affiliated with or a part of any organization, club or body outside of the Department, except that a Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, the United Spanish War Veterans and the

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[216] Slater, "Public Workers," 15.
[217] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 40.
[218] Slater, "Public Workers," 15.

> American Legion of World's War Veterans may be formed within the Department.[219]

As this addition ensured that the members of the Boston Police Department could not form or join any type of AFL affiliated union without officially going against the department and breaking an actual rule enforced by the Commissioner, it made unionization a seemingly punishable offense in the eyes of the Boston Police Department.

In the following few weeks, the nation began to focus its eyes on Boston and the controversy beginning to crop up around the creation of the Boston Police Union. Despite the prohibitions on police unionization, Commissioner Curtis attempted to appease the members of the Boston Police Department and their newly formed union by allowing them to unionize as long as they rescinded their charter from the AFL. Affiliation with this type of national organization was one of the few things differentiating this union from the previous and completely ineffective Boston Social Club, so the AFL charter was an issue on which the members of the union were unwilling to compromise.[220] Others attempted to compromise with the union as well, in order to avoid a strike at all costs. The most famous attempt was made by James J. Storrow and his 34-member committee, appropriately referred to as the Storrow Committee, which had been appointed by Mayor Peters.[221] Storrow, a wealthy and respected Boston businessman, was convinced that with higher wages and improvements in working conditions the police would readily surrender

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[219] Boston Police Department, Office of the Police Commissioner. "August 1919," *Police Records vol. 56 January 1, 1919 to December 31, 1919* (Boston: 1919): http://www.archive.org/stream/policerecordsjan08bost#page/n1/mode/2up
[220] Ibid., 156.
[221] Slater, *Public Workers*, 30.

their AFL charter.[222] Under Storrow's direction, the committee was charged with formally examining the situation, averting a strike or other disruption of work, and the proposition of a settlement that could be agreed upon by both the police department employees and the its leadership. A compromise was eventually drawn up by the committee and submitted to both Curtis and the Boston Police Union for approval, yet Curtis rejected the compromise and chaos broke out in the city before the union had a chance to vote on the plan.[223]

On August 26, 1919, eight members of the Boston Police Union, including famed President John McInnes, were arrested and tried for violating General Order 110. Three days later, eleven other men were tried for the same thing, in a hearing that lasted a total of only ten minutes, as if the Court had been planning on finding them guilty before the trial even began. On September 7, Commissioner Curtis suspended all nineteen patrolmen that had been tried, finding them in violation of Section 19 of Rule 35 of the Rules and Regulations of the Police Department due to their membership in the Boston Police Union.[224] In response, an emergency meeting of the Boston Police Union was held that night, at which all but 2 attendees voted in favor of a walkout. Consequently, 1117 of the 1544 Boston patrolmen officially walked out on strike at 5:45 on the evening of September 9, 1919.[225] Only lower ranking patrolmen were involved in the strike. Because those of higher rank were little affected by hierarchical abuse, they did not readily

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[222] White, "A Triumph of Bureaucracy," 161.
[223] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 157-158.
[224] Slater, *Public Workers*, 26.
[225] White, "A Triumph of Bureaucracy," 167.

sacrifice their jobs in order to show their solidarity with the mass of regular police department employees.[226]

In the chaos that ensued during the first weeks of September 1919, Bostonians of all classes questioned the nature of police work and public unionization. The chronology of the Boston Police Strike and the event's aftermath are representative of the struggle endured by Boston policemen to challenge the power of the Brahmins in the Boston social hierarchy, therefore questioning the place of the Irish working class community within hierarchy. The response of Brahmin Boston to the police strike is representative of the upper class struggle with a changing world in the aftermath of the First World War and the classist and nationalist attitudes generally exhibited by the wealthy American upper class, particularly in response to labor organization and immigrant communities. The days and weeks following the Boston Police Strike were crucial to both Boston's history and Boston's society, helping to define and emphasize the traditional social organization of the city's population through the suppression of the police workers and their aspirations of achieving a higher standard of living and the elimination of such rigid class divisions.

[226] Slater, *Public Workers*, 161.

Chapter 3: The Boston Police Strike and Its Aftermath

The Boston Police Strike of 1919 was ultimately a failed attempt by a segment of Boston's Irish working class to challenge and reorganize the traditional, Brahmin based social structure of the city, especially as many workers believed that unionization was a way to maintain many of the gains in fairness and equality they had made during the First World War. Enclosing a newspaper clipping with the headline, "What is a policeman?" in his letter to Police Commissioner Curtis, Fred A. Derry offered an answer to the question posed by a Boston periodical. He wrote, "A police-man is an ignorant person (generally Irish,) who joins the police force to avoid work," showing his class based prejudices and stereotypical associations with the Irish community and obviously connecting these 'inherent characteristics' with their inability to properly perform their police duties.[227] Many members of the Brahmin community held similar views, believing that unionization of ethnic working class particularly in the law enforcement industry would only enhance these negative and un-American characteristics of police officers. The only way to maintain the traditional social structure of Boston, a structure favoring the elite, upper class, was to suppress police union activity and the Boston Police Strike.

The efforts of the Boston Police Union were no match for the upper class Brahmins, who asserted their elitism and power over the city's socioeconomic life through the suppression of union activity and public sector strikes. Upper class views of Americanism celebrated tradition, virtue and religion, yet these views celebrated elitist

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[227] Fred A. Derry, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, August 25, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

understandings of these values.[228] The strike threatened the social equilibrium in Boston and went against traditionalist notions of Americanism, and the upper classes feared an overhaul of society by the ethnic working class, which, in their view, occupied a necessarily subordinate social position.[229] The upper classes asserted their influence through the verbal condemnation of the strike and the replacement of the striking policemen with worthy members of the upper class as a method of suppressing working class attempts at societal change. It did little to change the existing social hierarchy or mitigate ethnic tensions. The end of the Boston Police Strike saw the end of a wave of early twentieth-century public police unionization, affirmed the traditional Boston social structure, and effectively ended policemen's hopes of being treated as both workers and employees until a second wave of police unionization began almost half a century later.

On the first evening of the famed walkout, September 9, 1919, the city found itself with inadequate and extremely minimal police protection. While the arrested patrolmen had been suspended and later officially discharged from their duties, city leaders identified the striking officers as having "abandoned their duty."[230] Only 427 officers of a typical 700 remained on duty,[231] with a mere 24 officers walking the beat in

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[228] Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11.
[229] Jonathan Randall White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy: The Boston Police Strike and the Ideological Origins of the American Police Structure* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University, 1982), 208.
[230] Service record, "Daniel J. A. Kelleher," Boston Police Department Archives, Boston, MA.
[231] Richard L. Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," *The New England Quarterly* 20 no.2 (June 1947): 160.

the city center.[232] Nothing of this scale had ever occurred before, despite previous attempts at police strikes in other parts of the country and world.[233]

As predicted by John Burton and Charles Krider, who argue that the deterioration of public order occurs almost immediately after essential employees, such as firemen and policemen, go on strike,[234] Boston entered into a state of complete social chaos after the policemen's walkout. The city experienced an unusually high level of social turmoil and an extreme upsurge in crime as a direct result of the lack of policemen patrolling the streets, enough to attract national media attention. Though real rioting did not begin until a number of hours after the official walkout at 5:45 p.m., "blatant gambling, gathering of restive crowds, and assorted kinds of mischief and vandalism merely inaugurated the spirit of license that later excited the city."[235] Boston experienced a state of absolute disorder, which lasted well into the following days.

The greatest numbers of people gathered in the city's notoriously ethnic sections, where citizens recorded a record amount of criminal activity. In many locations, large mobs gathered in anticipation of the walkout. In Scollay Square and South Boston, the mob became unusually violent. In Scollay Square, the heart of Boston's entertainment

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[232] Frederick Manuel Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1966): 180. Police strikes had been attempted in a variety of cities at the beginning of the 20th century, yet most were suppressed fairly rapidly. However, a police strike in Liverpool, England occurring between August 2 and August 10, 1919 is notable due to its striking similarities to the Boston Police Strike. This strike resulted in rioting, looting, and general chaos throughout the city, yet it too was suppressed within a matter of days and the status quo was restored upon the strike's end.

[233] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 45.

[234] John F. Burton, Jr. and Charles Krider, "The Role and Consequences of Strikes by Public Employees," *The Yale Law Journal* 79 no.3 (January 1970): 434.

[235] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 190.

district and thus considered one of the most corrupt parts of the city, a battle between rioters and guardsmen persisted until five decoy policemen with support from the Massachusetts cavalry were ale to suppress the violence.[236] In South Boston, one of the notoriously Irish districts, three volunteer policemen were brutally attacked, two men were killed and nine were wounded before the mob finally dispersed later in the evening of September 10.[237] A police station in South Boston, one at which a number of striking officers were stationed, remained under siege by the mob until the state guard was brought in.[238] In some places, the police both striking and not were the victims of physical attacks. Even other members of the Irish community attacked the police; for example, an Irish truck driver in one area of the city yelled at, then physically assaulted, an officer that had given him a traffic ticket amidst the chaos.[239] Though strikers mostly hailed from these sections of town and were members of those particular ethnic groups, their own communities heavily criticized the striking officers. These areas experienced much higher levels of violence than many of the more upper class sections of the city. Though this violence resulted partially from the absence of patrolling policemen who were usually needed to keep the peace and prevent crime, many other unionists, found in these ethnic sections of the city, felt that the police strike did not represent the interests of organized labor as a whole, but rather those belonging to a small segment of it.[240]

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[236] Ibid., 198.
[237] Ibid., 200.
[238] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 172.
[239] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 173.
[240] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 27.

While members of Boston's working class community suffered much of the physical effects of and damage from the strike, the upper classes seemed to voice their very strong opinions on police unionization and on the strike specifically much more frequently than their ethnic counterparts, doing so in order to rally public support for their cause and as a method of turning people against the strikers. For example, the print media with upper class readership in Boston and across the nation as well as an upper class employee base continuously reported the lawlessness of Bostonians in gripping detail and with typical journalistic exaggeration, helping to not only spread news of the strike but also sway public opinion in favor of anti-union forces. The main headline on the front page of the September 10 Boston Post read, "City in grip of mob; loot stores; reign of terror," indicating the level of pandemonium being experienced throughout the city while simultaneously attaching the police strike to historic images of mob rule, vicious dictatorships, and anti-democratic ideals. An editorial featured in the September 11 issue titled "Mob Rule in Boston" blamed the striking policemen for opening the door to criminal activity to the utmost extreme, and even stated that the strike must be considered a failure, though it was still underway, due to the high level violence and crime it had provoked.[241] A Washington Post headline on September 11 read, "Fatal Riot in Boston: One man killed, woman shot and officer beaten by the mob,"[242] and a headline in the Los Angeles Times written on the same day declared, "City takes on war-like appearance" and its attached article details a violent raid in Jamaica Plain, MA in which one person

[241] "No mob rule in Boston," *Boston Post*, September 11, 1919.
[242] "Fatal riot in Boston," *Washington Post*, September 11, 1919.

was shot and two more were wounded.[243] As was typical for the press from this period, journalists spread rumors through their provocative coverage in order to entice people into purchasing newspapers. Koss highlights, "newspapers not only reflect the times but also influence the reality of what they reflect."[244] While the print media was covering a real upsurge in chaos throughout Boston, this type of exaggerated news media coverage helped to increase tensions and sway opinion in favor of the Brahmins within the city by over emphasizing the danger posed by a lack of police, police unionization, and labor in general.

The New York Times, which claimed a much more national readership than many other papers, also tracked the strike's effect on Boston's general public. With reporting on the front page such as, "free from the restraining of the law, hundreds of young gangsters and hoodlums in a few districts proceeded at once to break windows, loot stores and cause disorder," it soon became clear to the rest of the country that Boston was becoming a hotbed of chaos and disorder.[245] Headlines spoke of "Gamblers, thugs, and thieves"[246] and "miscellaneous ruffians" who had rushed to Boston to "share in the feast of misrule."[247] Striking policemen left their usual neighborhood beats "defenseless against crime and its variants, anarchy, and Bolshevism,"[248] and the majority of the remainder of Boston's citizenry felt betrayed by their usual protectors. By using vivid

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[243] "City takes on war-like appearance," *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1919.
[244] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 154.
[245] "Boston Police force out on strike; mobs smash windows and loot stores; steel workers confer on strike," *New York Times,* September 10, 1919.
[246] "Battle in Boston streets," *New York Times*, September 11, 1919.
[247] "The way to deal with police strikes," *New York Times*, September 12, 1919.
[248] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy,* 206.

terminology like hoodlums, ruffians, and anarchy, the media was able to create a binary vision of society in which the policemen were solely responsible for keeping the peace between the two sides, between the forces of order and chaos. Through journalism, the unrest experienced in Boston was shown to be a direct result of the almost universal absence of policemen from the city's streets, showing a failure to adequately live up to the expectations of the office and the city's wealthy residents. Even when there was not any concrete strike news, reporters were able to print "anxiety-provoking rumors" surrounding the strike in order to increase tensions and heighten the emotional tone of the strike itself, simultaneously increasing the importance of the strike on a national level.[249]

It took until the evening of the strike's second day, Wednesday, September 10, for the city to calm down from its state of utter pandemonium and hysteria. Boston's citizen's had begun to take individual action to protect themselves and their property, and more than 2,000 gun permit applications were submitted to the Boston Police Department within a few hours of the walk-out.[250] Whereas on September 9, only 123 people were granted Revolver Licenses from the Department of the Police Commissioner, a record 1,082 licenses were granted on September 10.[251] Eventually, Mayor Peters utilized his power to take control of the police force, found in statutes from both 1885 and 1917, and called out the members of the State Guard to help return the city to some semblance of order. [252] The Boston Globe's Evening Edition reported that over 4,000 state guardsmen

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[249] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 153.
[250] Ibid., 183.
[251] Records of the police commissioner, pp 1202-1205, 1216-1241
[252] Ibid., 204.

were asked to report for police duty, yet this alone was not enough to return the city to a state of normalcy.[253]

Once the patrolmen involved in the Boston Police Union walked out on strike, the city looked to find adequate officers to create a legitimate, temporary police force. Since many upper class Bostonians blamed the events of the strike on unchangeable characteristics of the officers, using their ethnic origins and economic status as confirmation of their un-American and anarchic tendencies, it was clear that any replacement officers would need to be of a 'better' class and have a more 'respectable' background, again illustrating the domination of the upper class over their Irish neighbors. Many white-collar corporations were willing to loan out their employees for as long as the government needed. Of the 3,142 men assigned to special police duty, 1,954 came from administrative positions in corporations and business associations. The railroad, for example, directly assigned 220 men to police duty while still paying them their regular wages.[254] By Thursday, September 11, the city was being patrolled by a newly recruited temporary police force of approximately 7,000 men.[255]

From the start of September 1919 when rumors of strike began to be disseminated throughout the city, newspapers read by Boston's middle and upper classes began running advertisements for volunteer policemen on their front pages. The notice in the Boston Globe, first appearing on September 6 was looking to recruit, "able bodied men willing to give their services in case of necessity…for protection of persons and

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[253] "4000 state guardsmen called for police duty," *Boston Globe, Evening Edition,* September 10, 1919.
[254] White, *A triumph of Bureaucracy*, 169.
[255] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 163.

property."[256] Even in these pre-strike advertisements, class played a crucial role; just as many Bostonians had felt that the main duty of the pre-strike police force was to protect the property of wealthy Brahmins and middle-class Bostonians, these same Bostonians looked for members of their own community who would be loyal and protective of upper and middle class interests as replacement, volunteer policemen. As explained by Sara Stoutland, community members are more willing to place their trust in a police force if they believe that the police share their priorities, act dependably, and will treat those they are protecting with respect and admiration.[257] In a society so concerned with wealth and property, it was necessary for the new police force to be composed of people who would similarly prioritize these two things. As a result of both the concern for the protection of property as well as the aforementioned belief in the connection between ethnicity and anarchic tendencies, the people recruited, and who voluntarily offered their services, for the replacement police of Boston were mainly from the city's upper classes.

A makeshift force of about 500 men was assembled hastily "as an emergency measure for the protection of life and property," yet this was not nearly enough to keep the city under control.[258] By the time Mayor Peters called out the state guard to help suppress the strike, "he was already being assisted by a makeshift volunteer militia force made up of prominent Back Bay Brahmins, old-time Beacon Hill residents, and about

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[256] "Notice: Volunteer Police," *The Boston Globe, Evening Edition*, September 6, 1919.
[257] Sara E. Stoutland, "The Multiple Dimensions of Trust and Resident/Police Relations in Boston," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38 no.3 (August 2001): 227.
[258] "Boston policemen strike," *Los Angeles Times,* September 10, 1919.

fifty Harvard underclassmen."[259] Many of these men were reported to be "fine specimens of manhood," offering Bostonians with a blatant method of classification for the policemen who had been on strike; if the replacements were such fine specimens of manhood, indeed the ideal police officer and the epitome of a true American man, then the striking police officers were clearly none of those things.[260] Understandings of masculinity were connected to ideas of patriotism, especially in relation to the First World War, the war effort, and the support of democracy; this can be seen in the language and imagery of recruitment posters for the army.[261] This type of classification emphasized the division between the upper and the working class. The makeshift police force, the upper class volunteers asserting their patriotism and loyalty through public service in a time of need, was composed of real men, whereas the force of striking policemen, members of the ethnic working class, was not, thus enhancing the difference between the two classes with regard to personal character grounded in classist views of society. The mere compilation of this new police force acts as evidence of the immense role that economic class and ethnic division played in the chain of events leading to the strike's end.

The volunteer police force recruited as replacements for the striking policemen of the Boston Police Union embodied everything that the strikers did not, namely native, upper class origins and societal connections. Many Bostonians openly recognized that the

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[259] Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Hub: Boston Past and Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 195.
[260] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 146.
[261] Peter Jackson, "The Cultural Politics of Masculinity: Towards a Social Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16 no.2 (1991): 202.

fight against the strikers and the recruitment of replacement officers from upper class institutions was a fight to maintain upper class power in Boston, and they were proud to admit that their new officers were the type of people that were willing to protect upper class interests. James S. Murphy at Stickney & Poor Spice Co. wrote in a letter to Commissioner Curtis that the president of his company is "proud there are some Americans left that will stand for the rights of what seems to be, at the present time, the privileged class."[262] Even though police work, in contrast to police administration, was not generally believed to be an acceptable profession for the more affluent members of Boston's society,[263] exceptions were made in the case of the Boston Police Strike because these men were not only working to protect the property and safety of their peers but also the democracy and American nationalism that characterized the immediate post-war era.

Most replacement officers came from traditional positions of respect and admiration, from recently discharged military officers to current and former Harvard students.[264] Harvard University was one of the places from which many of the volunteer police were recruited, and the media immediately latched on to this as a way of differentiating, and highlighting the differences between, the ethnic strikers and the native, protestant Bostonians. This was especially easy, particularly because Harvard as an institution had become a crucial focal point of class identity and an institution in

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[262] James S. Murphy, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 23, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[263] White, *A Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 194.
[264] O'Connor, *The Hub*, 196.

which upper class values were acculturated to distinguish them from other Bostonians.[265] Newspapers continuously featured profiles of prominent men, generally Harvard alumni as well as current students, who had offered their services as volunteers to the government. On September 8, 1919, the Boston Globe featured an articled titled, "Percy Haughton to help protect city," in which it described Haughton's successful career as the Harvard Football coach and the Director of the Braves Baseball Club. It then went on to detail a meeting for prospective police recruits, specifically highlighting those in attendance; "a number of other Harvard graduates, some of them ex-athletes, many of them prominent and professional businessmen" were also looking to volunteer, it stated.[266] The main headline on the front page of the Globe's evening edition on the following day read, "Harvard organizing force for police duty in Boston," and the article emphasized that all 125 members of the football team were scheduled for police duty. It included portraits of three "former Harvard athletes" also scheduled for work, highlighting their achievements; the fact that the enlistment in the volunteer police of Percy Haughton, Morril Wiggin, and Huntingdon R. Hardwick, prominent Harvard men and Bostonians, was deemed important enough to be featured on the front page of the paper alongside actual strike news, illustrated the emphasis Bostonians throughout the strike put on class, ethnicity, and social connections.[267] Where the working class had failed the city, the upper class was willing and able to step in, further emphasizing the

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[265] Ronald Story, "Harvard and the Boston Brahmins: A Study in Institutional and Class Development, 1800-1865," *Journal of Social History* 8 no.3 (Spring 1975): 112.
[266] "Percy Haughton to help protect city," *The Boston Globe*, September 8, 1919.
[267] "Harvard organizing force for police duty in Boston," *The Boston Globe, Evening Edition*, September 9, 1919.

belief that the working class did not deserve to win the strike or change the way society was organized because of their inability to keep order within the city without the help of their upper class neighbors.

The success of journalistic attempts to sway public opinion in favor of Curtis and the city's economic elite[268] is obvious in the abundance of letters written to Curtis by members of Boston's upper classes. Written mostly in response to Curtis's suspension of the 19 patrolmen who had been arrested, Boston businessmen and wealthy Brahmins expressed their gratitude to Curtis for his stance on police unionization as well offered suggestions and commendations on his work. As would be expected of the city's upper class residents, every letter expresses anger and resentment towards the striking policemen, and many writers chose particularly strong language to express their feelings.

Some citizens warned Curtis of the consequences of a union victory, anticipating the significance the strike would hold in the city's history. "This struggle is of great importance, not only to the city of Boston, but to the entire country, and I trust that you will fight it through to a successful conclusion in order that we may have a reign of law instead of a rule of class," C.J. Morrison of Fairhaven, Massachusetts wrote.[269] This is particularly ironic, as the strike was ultimately a symbolic class struggle rather than an issue of labor law. What Morrison really feared, though merely implied, was not rule by a social class on principle but instead rule by a social class other than that to which he belonged.

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[268] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 149.
[269] C.J. Morrison, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 12, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

Many Bostonians feared the strikers not because of their union alliances but because of their un-American values and immoral characters, often associated with their ethnic affiliations. J.W. Pickering, Counsellor [sic] at Law, wrote of the strikers, "They have been false to their official oaths—worse than perjurers in Court—and have deliberately and purposely plunged the city into the hands of the thugs and criminals with whom they have thus allied themselves."[270] Using even stronger words, Felix B. Laman at Walter D. Noyes, of the Eastern & Pacific Coast Lumber expressed a similar opinion of the strikers, not attacking their policies or their actions, but rather their personal character. Laman addressed Curtis more personally in his letter, asserting, "you are the one man with guts enough to tell Sam Gompers and his whole gang of illiterate parasites to return whence they came if they don't care to respect the laws of this country. Give 'em H-l. The better people rich and poor are behind you."[271] It is clear that both Pickering and Laman believed that unionists are liars, anti-American, and anti-democratic. Laman even went one step further, implying that the striking policemen were not among the "better people" in the city and therefore belonged to an uncivilized class of men. To many Bostonians, the strikers epitomized all that was un-American in the post-war era;

[270] J.W. Pickering, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 11, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[271] Felix B. Laman, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 12, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

this was particularly so in the wake of the 1919 Red Scare and Race Riots rooted in the recent experience with war.[272]

Similarly, many Bostonians believed that the problem with unionization stemmed not from the actual union's existence but from its membership. George H. Lawley of George Lawley & Son Corporation, Builders of Yachts and Motorboats, expressed this opinion in his letter, stating that unions, "…cause us trouble on every hand…because they are led by a lot of unprincipled men who do not earn their living and whose sole object is to cause all the trouble they possible can." In addition to the insinuation that the origins of the union members led them to have few legitimate values when it came to work and citizenship, Lawley believed that the members of the Boston Police Union were ultimately troublemakers who cared little for the welfare of the community members they protected, specifically middle and upper class Bostonians.[273] At the root of many of the condemnations of the strikers was an attack on their values and character, something associated with upbringing, ethnicity and social class.

Some citizens went beyond the mere expression of gratitude, writing Curtis to offer their resources and manpower to the state, should any aid be required. Robert S. Hale, resident of Boylston Street in one of Boston's upper class neighborhoods, was ready to offer the service of his chauffer and his many cars to the police department, though he was obviously unwilling to offer his personal service as a replacement officer.

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[272] Burl Noggle, *Into the Twenties: The United States from Armistice to Normalcy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 4.
[273] George H. Lawley, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, August 18, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

After expressing his approval of Curtis's actions thus far, he wrote, "I took pleasure in loaning my cars to Captain Rooney of Police Station #12, alternating with my chauffer in driving for him until I left town…on business;[274] he was willing to provide resources to the Police Commissioner, yet he was too busy, engaged with 'more important things,' to stay in Boston and see the strike through.

Some businesses, like Harding, Cox, & Martin, Real Estate Syndicate, were willing to offer the use of their employees as volunteer policemen. In a letter signed by the entire company, they recommended their associates to Curtis; "We have at our disposal some very good, able bodied men, volunteers, draftees…who would make good and efficient police officers for our district, the conduct of which throughout these trying conditions commends itself to you," the September 18, 1919 letter said.[275] Another man even went so far as to request that Curtis disregard the civil service requirements for joining the Boston Police Force. Arguing that, "it seems that some leeway, in regard to age, is due those who risked their lives to protect life and property during the unjust strike," Alexander MacLeod believed that his son, a minor who had acted as a volunteer policeman during the strike, deserved to continue his duties as a policeman despite his technical ineligibility due to age. [276] Many members of Boston's upper classes were

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[274] Robert S. Hale, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 19, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[275] Harding, Cox, & Martin, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 18, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[276] Alexander MacLeod, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 16, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

willing to do anything they could, including volunteering themselves, their family members and their co-workers to help Curtis suppress the strike. People were willing to support the anti-strike effort in unconventional ways, though they were merely asserting a type of selfish generosity in that the suppression of the police strike would ultimately maintain their position of power and supremacy in Boston society.

Many upper class Bostonians also expressed nationalist beliefs and a fear of Bolshevism in their letters to Curtis, believing that a union victory would usher in an era of revolution and Bolshevik rule. Many expressed this through dramatic predictions of a Boston in which the union had won, writing, "If you allow your men to break their sworn oath as to their allegiance to this Commonwealth and to this institution alone, what are we coming to? Revolution, most certainly."[277] Others made more blatant accusations directed at Bolshevik sympathizers. Patrick Fitzgerald seemed to believe that the Bolsheviks were unquestionably behind the unionization of the Boston Police Department as a method through which to undermine American democracy. In his letter on August 18, weeks before the strike even began, he wrote:

> Stand fast for our homes and the Right! The Am. Fed. Labor may know it or not, but this police unionization is a part of the new move by the Bolsheviki of Russia and Bocht Land. It is a part of their plan to weaken the protection of law and order to the end that they may carry out here the program they put through in Petrograd, Moscow, Berlin that is 1 – open the prisons, 2 – steal and kill, 3 – have no punishment for anything whatever.[278]

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[277] F.D. Warren, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, August 16, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

[278] Patrick Fitzgerald, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, August 18, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

Though seemingly radical himself, Fitzgerald was not alone in his anti-Bolshevik sentiments. Another man similarly wrote, "We have read enough of Bolsheviki, and I.W.W., and Old-World turbulence; we do not desire to see our own fair democratic republic seething with a like unrest and discord. Indeed, this 'Federation' may be the fruit of foreign propaganda," making the claim that the strike was undoubtedly orchestrated by Bolshevik sympathizers overseas.[279] Many saw the strike as evidence of Soviet encroachment into the United States. Even later into the year 1919, it was clear through what was printed in the Boston Labor World that many believed Bolshevism was in opposition to all that American labor and the labor movement stood for. Hence, Curtis's strong anti-union actions were viewed as a symbol of American power and the triumph of what Gary Gerstle refers to as the traditionalist dimension of Americanism. This traditionalist Americanism focused on the mythic essence of America, based in family, discipline, virtue and religious fundamentalism, and often relegated immigrant workers to a subordinate place in American social life. Many upper class Bostonians identified with this particular brand of nationalism, especially as it stood in opposition to more progressive visions of America which gave the growing working class an increasing power in everyday society.[280]

As a result, it is not surprising that this understanding of Americanism took center stage in many of the letters Curtis received from members of the elite greater-Boston

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[279] Augustus S. Small, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, August 15, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[280] Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 11.

community throughout August and September 1919. One man connected his feelings of Americanism to his New England heritage, stating:

> Although the damage to me financially has been great and all the mental anxiety considerable, I could not help feeling through it all that it was simply my part in a new era in which a long period of more or less serious disregard of law and order would be corrected and the old New England spirit of Americanism be established more firmly now than ever.[281]

H. Leander D'Entremont of Salem, Massachusetts showed his support of the strike through an assertion of his nationalist identity; not only did he offer congratulations to Curtis from "A 100% American citizen," he also composed and enclosed a new American national anthem inside his letter.[282] Another man, Willis B. Leonard of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, expressed his hope that the new police force would be "at least 70% American,"[283] and James Wilson Grimes, Counsellor [sic] at Law, advised Curtis to "Discharge every one of the strikers and go back in the country towns and get some husky Yankee boys to put in their places." Grimes also reminded Curtis that, "Good Americans and Yankees do not strike."[284] The Boston Post even printed an editorial stating, "We are all American together. Let us act like Americans," making it even more clear that in the eyes of many, especially the general public of Boston, the police strike

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[281] Henry J. Bown, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 26, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[282] H. Leander D'Entremont, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 18, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[283] Willis B. Leonard, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 14, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).
[284] James Wilson Grimes, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 11, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

did not only symbolize the maintenance of the old social hierarchy but also was an assertion of American supremacy and nationalist tendencies of post-war America.[285] While many workers saw unionization in the post-war era as a way to maintain the gains made during the First World War, members of the upper class more strongly opposed collective action than ever before.[286]

Through the letters Curtis received, it is clear that upper class Bostonians not only believed the Irish to be poor workers and unionists to be Bolshevik sympathizers, despite the fact that less than .001% of the adult American public officially belonged to one of the two communist parties,[287] but also believed that the combination of ethnicity and social class ultimately led these men to be anti-American and completely disloyal to their adopted, Brahmin dominated community. Especially as the Boston Police Strike occurred only a few weeks after a textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts where many believed that the Catholics involved in the strike, mostly recently arrived immigrants, were unquestionably communist, it comes as no surprise that Anglo-Protestant members of the Greater Boston community saw connections between Soviet sympathies and unionization in general.[288] The summer of 1919 in general saw an unprecedented amount of anti-Soviet actions, including the notorious Palmer Raids. The Boston Post recognized that Boston was not Moscow, yet it still printed a statement reading, "No Soviet mob rule for

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[285] "Stop It," *Boston Post*, September 12, 1919.
[286] Ed. Melvyn Dubofsky and Joseph A. McCartin, *American Labor: A Documentary Collection* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 149.
[287] Noggle, *Into the Twenties*, 95.
[288] James M. O'Toole, ""The Newer Catholic Races": Ethnic Catholicism in Boston, 1900-1940," *The New England Quarterly* 65 no.1 (March 1992): 129.

us, thank you."[289] It did not matter that the rumors of Soviet relations and communist undertones of the strike were false, because the media as well as influential members of the Boston community perpetuated these connections as a method of proving that the socioeconomic class and ethnic origins of the striking policemen were undoubtedly at the root of their anti-American tendencies. Despite the fact that the anti-communist hysteria running rampant through American society was exaggerated to the extent that it began to stereotype all members of the working class, unionist and not, as communist, many members of the upper class fell victim to the exaggerated rumors and acted as if all rumors of Bolshevik sympathies were unquestionably true.

Despite the general disapproval of most upper class members of Boston society and the widespread belief that police workers were different that the average wage worker, some members of the working class did support the strike and undertook sympathetic actions. The President of the Boston Central Labor Union issued a statement commending the policemen for "their courage in asserting their rights to protect and the promote the interests of themselves and their families through the application of the principles of collective bargaining."[290] The Boston Labor World printed continuous commendations of the strikers' actions, including accusations that Bostonians were too quick to demand the dismissal of the strikers and that the Boston Police Department had turned into an autocratic regime, reminding Bostonians that the striking policemen had

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[289] "No Mob Rule in Boston," *Boston Post*, September 11, 1919.
[290] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 56.

not only been subjected to an unfair wage but also to unjust humiliation and preferential treatment.[291]

Some actions that were seen as sympathetic may have in fact been a direct attack on upper class control over the city's culture and society by members of the working class. People who had volunteered to act as replacement officers were often met by threats of violence. Many tailors refused to make uniforms for the new patrolmen, especially significant because of the importance that uniforms had played in the transformation of the Boston Police Department into a thoroughly modern police force. Regardless of whether or not other working class Bostonians agreed with the actions of the strikers, it was obvious that they were against the aggressive, controlling policies of the city's wealthy elite.

The city countered these efforts by granting recruited police a $300 rise in salary from what patrolmen had been making previously, gave them their first uniform for free, and created a pension system.[292] Ironically, the volunteer police received everything that the striking patrolmen had been demanding, revealing that the strike was only superficially about material gains and the betterment of working conditions. In fact, the strike was a symbolic struggle of the ethnic working class to restructure the social hierarchy, challenging Boston's traditional class divisions and elitist social constructions. The improvements to police work made upon the replacement of the striking officers, the progressive gains that working class Americans across all industries had been fighting to procure for the past century, were not the ultimate goal of the Boston Police Strike.

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[291] "Place the Blame Where It Belongs," *Boston Labor World*, September 20, 1919.
[292] Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 165-166.

Instead, these material concerns were merely a vehicle through which the policemen could address their real grievances, those related to class hierarchy and societal organization. Ultimately, the policemen failed in their attempt to alter the organization of Boston society.

According to historian Frederick Koss, it was the citizenry of Boston, through the support of Americans nationwide, who had written the ending to the police struggle.[293] Through their condemnation of the striker's actions and their unconditional support of their fellow Brahmins, like Commissioner Curtis and Governor Coolidge, they were able to end the wave of police unionization and silence public workers for decades to come. In fact, none of the striking policemen ever worked for the Boston Police Force after their walkout.[294] John McInnes, famed leader of the Boston Police Union, is listed as a bricklayer in the 1920 Federal Census of Population.[295] Other strikers found themselves in similar situations. Edmund Burke is recorded as being a clerk for the railroad, James G. Peters became an automobile salesman, and Hugh F. Garrity is listed as a watchman in the Navy Yard.[296] The suppression of the Boston Police Strike provoked the destruction of all 37 other police locals affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, and their

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[293] Koss, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," 342.
[294] Thomas B. Silver, "Prelude to an Interpretation: Coolidge and the Historians," (Ph.D. diss., Claremont, 1980): 71.
[295] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 20, Suffolk, Massachusetts, Roll T625_738, Page 12B, Enumeration District 496, Image 862.
[296] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Lawrence Ward 5, Essex, Massachusetts, Roll T625_692, Page 17A, Enumeration District 127, Image 686. *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 20, Suffolk, Massachusetts, Roll T625_738, Page 37A, Enumeration District 498, Image 947. *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1920,* Boston Ward 16, Suffolk, Massachusetts, Roll T625_733, Page 14A, Enumeration District 419, Image 376.

final defeat, symbolic of their failed struggle to be seen as workers and employees rather than puppets of the state, was their failure to win reinstatement after the end of the strike, made official when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court upheld the dismissal of the strikers on November 7, 1919.[297]

Rather than create a new understanding of the role and position of police officers within the Boston social hierarchy, the police strike left officers in "a paternalistic limbo," one in which they would not be able to overcome until over half a century later.[298] Even then, legislation often prohibited policemen from striking in order to "maintain law enforcement services without disruption."[299] Burton and Krider see this type of legislation as essential, because strikes in essential municipal services would immediately endanger the community's health and safety, and therefore should be presumed illegal.[300] The Boston Police Strike effectively failed to establish a role for individual policemen, leaving them in the exact same position as that in which they had started the strike.[301] In the end, the Brahmin elite of Boston were able to maintain their status, traditionally at the top of the socioeconomic and intellectual ladder, through the suppression of police unionization within the city.

According to White, the Boston Police Strike was one of the "ending dramas" of the Progressive Era, signaling a shift into a new decade and a new era of American

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[297] Joseph E. Slater, *Public Workers: Government Employee Unions, The Law, and the State, 1900-1962* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2004), 34-35.
[298] White, *The Triumph of Bureaucracy*, 203.
[299] Albert J. Reiss, Jr., "Police Organization in the Twentieth Century," *Crime and Justice* 15 (1992): 88.
[300] Burton and Krider, "The Role and Consequences of Strikes," 433.
[301] Slater, *Public Workers*, 187.

history.[302] Another wave of police reform during which an attempt at administrative transformation, mirroring the previous attempts at reform during the 1890s, was inaugurated during the inter-war period, and the beginning of this drive to yet again reform urban police can be traced back to the end of the Boston Police Strike. The Boston Police Strike of 1919, unique from other working class efforts aimed at material gains and superficial improvements in working conditions, was a failed attempt by the ethnic working class to gain control of the social system in a major industrial city. It provoked a wave of reform during which the middle and upper classes attempted to take back control of municipal governments and departments from the very hands of the ethnic working class, putting it back in the hands of those traditionally in charge.[303]

The editorial printed in the Boston Sunday Post on September 14, 1919 is representative of the impact the strike had on the city and the nation at large. It read:

> It has been a strenuous week for Boston – a chapter in her history never to be forgotten. Boston is not proud of the record; in some respects it is very black.…But the darkest days have passed…perhaps it is well that the issue has been fought out, rather than that the menace should continue to hang over the city. It will be a long time before there will occur another strike of the Boston Policemen. The lesson has been learned in the hard school of experience. It is a severe lesson and it will be long remembered… Thus, law and order win out in our good old city, and it will be many a day before it is threatened in like manner. Boston is Herself again.[304]

Once order had been restored, Boston's social organization and class structure appeared to have been affected little by the strike. When Post symbolically claimed that Boston

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[302] Ibid., 216.
[303] Bruce C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labor: The Police in American Politics," *Theory and Society* 3 no.1 (Spring 1976): 101-102.
[304] "Boston Is Herself Again," *Boston Sunday Post*, September 14, 1919.

was "herself again," it showed that Boston had returned to its pre-strike state, rather than evolved into a new Boston. By returning the city to a state of normalcy, Boston's upper, and controlling, classes had effectively affirmed the already established social structure and eliminated any hope of a city run by a powerful majority, the ethnic working class.

Leonard S. Smith of Shelburne Falls, MA wrote of the Boston Police Strike, "It is simply a case of whether we shall live under a law for the majority or bow to a small minority."[305] Though he meant for the striking policemen to be associated with the "small minority" in his statement, it is ultimately to another small minority that the city bowed: the wealthy upper class. In the end, the strike marked the conclusion of an era of social struggle between the upper and working classes, ushering in an era of conformity, social repression, and intense American nationalism dictated by upper class, rather than working class, Bostonians.

[305] Leonard S. Smith, letter to Police Commissioner Edwin Curtis, September 12, 1919 (included in Boston Police Strike Documents of 1919, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, accessed on July 30, 2010).

Conclusion

Calvin Coolidge famously responded to the Boston Police Strike by stating, "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime," echoing the sentiments of most members of Boston's upper classes with regard to the events of September 1919.[306] This statement makes apparent the success of the Brahmins in suppressing the efforts of the city's Irish working class, which attempted to reorganize Boston society and redefine their community's place within it through a walkout in a distinctively essential public industry. Members of the working class, a majority of Boston's population by the early twentieth century, learned the lesson that acting in opposition to the beliefs and visions of the wealthy Brahmin class would get them nowhere in their fight for fairness and equality. They would be unable to make any headway in their quest for economic, social, and ethnic justice, if they questioned the authority of the Brahmins in traditional Boston life.

The events of the Boston Police Strike of 1919 concluded at the end of that infamous year, when the last members of the Massachusetts State Militia were withdrawn from Boston on December 21.[307] Though the strike unified much of the Boston Irish working class and solidified their presence as an influential force on the city's social scene, the elite Brahmins ultimately came out on top, publicly pronouncing and strongly upholding their status and power over their working class neighbors. The doomed history of the Boston Police Union's creation, affiliation with the American Federation of Labor,

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[306] Richard L. Lyons, "The Boston Police Strike of 1919," *The New England Quarterly* 20 no.2 (June 1947): 165.
[307] Ibid., 166.

and failed strike of September 1919 only emphasized the success of the Brahmins in maintaining control and power over the populous, ethnic working class majority. Bostonians has never forgotten this defining event in their city's history, and given the persistence of ethnic and class struggle within the city through to the present day, it surely never will.

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