

# THINK "I" AND YOU WORK ALONE

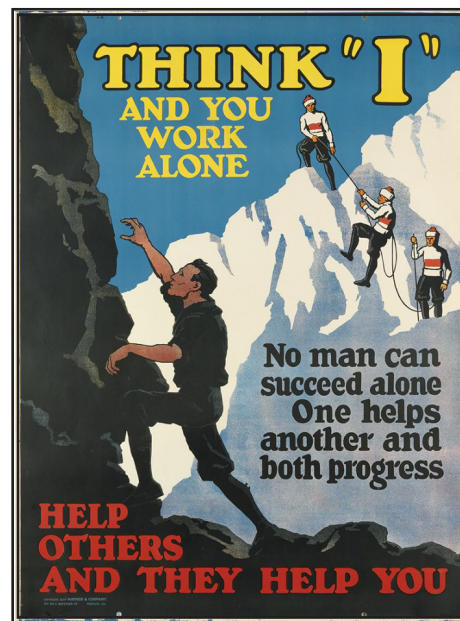
## Mather Constructive Character Posters and the Advertising of Self-Mastery

By Carolyn Zola

During the widespread economic prosperity of the 1920s in the United States, employers faced a serious problem retaining workers. The labor movement had been weakened after losing massive strikes in 1919, but the memory of that turbulent period haunted employers. Immigration restrictions enacted in the middle of the decade curtailed employers' ability to fire and replace workers as they saw fit, and an expanding economy put workers in demand. Employers needed a uniform message to sell their workers on company loyalty. It was in this context that Mather and Company produced hundreds of motivational workplace posters, selling them to companies across the country. These posters appear at first glance to be little more than a cacophony of banal exhortations to good work habits. Yet among the jumble of images and messages, a powerful, coherent ideology urged workers to have loyalty not merely to employers, but to each other. This paper argues that these posters and related materials fostered communalism through four distinct themes: warning against moving from job to job, condemning a reliance on luck, asserting strict guidelines for workplace speech, and exhorting workers to control their emotions, all underpinned with a powerful celebration of masculinity. This project is based on an analysis of nearly three hundred posters produced by Mather and Company, as well as related materials. This project complicates and deepens our current understanding of workplace dynamics during the 1920s, and offers new insight into the sophisticated workplace propaganda of the period.

FIGURE 1

THINK "I" AND YOU WORK ALONE



“Think ‘I’ and You Work Alone” proclaims a brightly colored poster. “No man can succeed alone. One helps another and both progress. Help Others and They Help You” (fig.1). In the foreground, a strong, muscular man struggles to climb up a steep cliff. In the background, a group of men easily scale the mountain, each helping the other. The message is clear: individualism leads to failure. Although he is powerful and determined, the lone climber is nonetheless defeated by his inability to work with others. This large poster, measuring about 3 feet by 4 feet, was probably hung near the time clock that regulated the workday in an office or factory as part of an innovative motivational campaign to shape worker behavior during the 1920s. Stylistically similar to many of the patriotic posters that had proliferated during World War I, it also shared visual and textual elements common to advertisements of the period.

Mather and Company, based in Chicago, produced and sold this motivational workplace poster and hundreds of others like it from 1923 to 1929. Along with these “Constructive Organization Pictorial Posters,” Mather and Company produced supplementary products such as “Heart-to Heart” pamphlets and “Suggest-O-Grams,” intended for employees to read in order to reinforce the messages of the posters.<sup>1</sup> The company claimed to have sold these products to tens of thousands of companies across the country, including Endicott-Johnson, Kellogg, and Kodak.<sup>2</sup> They were so successful that they also opened offices in London and Toronto. By the late 1920s the company had sold these same posters to thousands of churches across the United States. A careful examination of the extant Mather papers suggests that a wide variety of Protestant churches bought the posters and displayed them. A catalogue that was created specifically to sell to churches paired each poster with a Bible verse. A pastor wrote to say that he liked the posters because they were not “sugary” or “sanctimonious,” and appealed to the hardheaded man.<sup>3</sup>

1 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 14, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

2 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 7, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

3 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 5, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago

Historian David Gray, in one of the only scholarly articles discussing the Mather posters, emphasizes the themes of individualism and loyalty to the company. This interpretation is incomplete in light of the recurring themes of group harmony and communalism in the approximately 350 posters that Mather produced.<sup>4</sup> The Mather posters present a bewildering number of images, messages, and ideas: tigers warning about mistakes, hammer heads cautioning against angry outbursts, athletes excelling in their chosen sport, old women gossiping, peacocks strutting, a porcupine scowling, vultures warning of waste, babies celebrating the new year, a Spaniard procrastinating, and dams leaking, to name just a few. Their textual messages, too, seemed to present a cacophony of platitudes and banal exhortations to adopt good work habits. But examined closely, they reveal a strikingly coherent ideology.

This paper will argue that the Mather posters promoted self-disciplined masculinity as a means of fostering communalism and group harmony not just between workers and their employers but, more importantly, among the workers themselves. The posters condemned drifting, spreading rumors, relying on luck, and losing emotional control because these behaviors undermined group cohesion.

## I. Turbulent Years and the Emergence of Mather and Company

Mather and Company began producing the workplace posters in 1923 at the close of a long, contentious period of struggle between workers and employers in the United States.<sup>5</sup> During the late 19th and early 20th centuries a significant number of strikes involved considerable violence on both sides.<sup>6</sup> Workers during this period faced tremendous obstacles: deskilling, which reduced the bargaining position of industrial workers; ethnic heterogeneity, which complicated working class unity; and trade unions, which had little use for the masses of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Furthermore, although government was ostensibly neutral during this period, it usually sided with employers through injunctions and the deployment of state troops to put down strikes.

Historian Lizabeth Cohen explains that even hard-won gains by labor were quickly lost during these turbulent times. She points to the short-lived success of industrial workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912, where victory under the leadership of the radical labor organization Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was quickly undone as employers successfully pitted workers of different ethnicities and national origins against one another.<sup>7</sup> Cohen argues that this type of strategy became common in the years leading up to World War I.<sup>8</sup> Although it was frequently successful, this practice backfired during the strikes of 1919, when ethnic homogeneity fed labor militarism.<sup>9</sup> In the years after 1919 employers increasingly placed workers in ethnically heterogeneous groups in an effort to avoid such militancy in the future. Employers saw that group cohesion was a potentially explosive aspect of workplace power dynamics.

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4 David Gray, "Managing Motivation: Seth Seiders Syndicate and the Motivational Publicity Business in the 1920s," *Winterthur Portfolio* 44, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/651088>.

5 Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

6 *Ibid.*, 2.

7 Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919 - 1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

8 *Ibid.*, 163.

9 *Ibid.*

Massive strikes drew millions to picket lines in 1919, during the largest series of strikes in the history of the United States.<sup>10</sup> Workers from diverse industries including policemen, textile workers, steel workers, coal miners, and telephone operators participated. In all, more than twenty percent of Americans fought to protect the gains that they had made in wages and hours during the war.<sup>11</sup> Although 1919 had witnessed broad participation in these strikes, by the early 1920s industrial and mass production workers had been soundly trounced by governmental repression fueled by Red Scare paranoia, powerful resistance on the part of employers, and workers themselves who “proved incapable of mounting the unified action necessary for success.”<sup>12</sup> This lack of group cohesion proved to be an important factor in workers’ defeats. After the debacle of the 1919 strikes, union membership plummeted. In the mid-1920s strict immigration legislation slowed the influx of new, low-paid laborers to a trickle. For much of the previous century, a steady stream of immigrants had contributed to an abundant supply of labor, allowing employers tremendous freedom to fire and replace workers whenever labor tensions arose, exerting a downward pressure on wages. With a rapidly expanding economy after 1922, retaining employees, increasing efficiency, and deterring unionization became increasingly important to employers.

Employers utilized a number of strategies to meet these goals including new pay scales, promotion schemes, and Americanization programs.<sup>13</sup> In addition to these approaches employers increasingly embraced welfare capitalism, which came into full flower during the 1920s.<sup>14</sup> Welfare capitalism encompassed a broad set of interlocking policies and practices ranging from life insurance, company stock plans, and company unions, to leisure activities such as company sports teams and picnics.<sup>15</sup> Employers used these approaches in order to blunt unionization and discourage work stoppages. They also sought with such strategies to order and regulate the lives of workers on the factory floor and in the home. But welfare capitalism programs were not enough to sell the right ideas to workers; uniform, carefully crafted, mass-produced messages, such as those expressed in the Mather and Company posters, promised to fill this need.

The Mather posters sought to create a particular version of loyalty and group identity among workers. These ideas were not merely flights of intellectual fancy; they could have real consequences for employers. Ethnic loyalties could be reconstituted outside of work in neighborhood activities, mutual aid societies, and taverns. Union organizers, though weak in this period, could still win the loyalties of discontented workers in these contexts. Solidarity, the watchword of radical labor, had to be redefined and redeployed in the service of business interests. Cohen argues that employers sought to foster relationships with their workers on an individual basis. “When employers tried to isolate workers from each other and orient them individually toward the company, they intended that no kind of peer community, ethnic or interethnic, would intervene. Employers wanted workers to depend solely on the boss.”<sup>16</sup> Some of the Mather posters celebrated this particular relationship, but far more of them celebrated, either explicitly or implicitly, a communalism among workers. Cohen emphasizes the concerted efforts of employers to redirect employee loyalties to their employers during this period. This project adds to her argument by demonstrating that Mather and Company, an important but little

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10 Ibid., 12.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 13.

13 Ibid.

14 Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, 28.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 167.

studied producer of workplace propaganda, repeatedly deployed messages of group harmony and communalism *among* workers.

## II. Selling the Right Idea

Mather and Company claimed that its posters could solve a wide variety of workplace problems. It also claimed to have conducted extensive research into problems stemming from "the human element"<sup>17</sup> and asserted that it based its poster service on over 10,000 questionnaires sent to executives and managers across the country.<sup>18</sup> The company sold its poster service to a wide range of businesses. These businesses would receive seventy-eight posters, along with frames to hang them, and a catalogue of workplace ills that a foreman could consult in order to address specific workplace problems.<sup>19</sup> Mather's sales materials encouraged companies to change the posters each week, and stressed the importance of displaying several copies of the same poster throughout the factory.<sup>20</sup> These suggestions obviously served Mather's bottom line, but they also reflected the way the company conceptualized its product. Just as advertisers in the period stressed the importance of repeated viewings of a message to sell products, Mather stressed the importance of repeated viewings to sell what it considered "right thinking" to employees.<sup>21</sup> It clearly understood its poster service to be a type of advertising, frequently referring to it as an advertising campaign.<sup>22</sup> It claimed to be following the principles laid out by "the world's largest billboard producers."<sup>23</sup>

Mather's poster campaigns represented an important shift away from older ideas about managing workers. Employers had long relied on both state power such as police and state militia, and private forces such as the Pinkerton Detective Agency to resolve strikes. Other methods, such as the scientific management theory developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the early twentieth century, sought to solve workplace problems through developing new forms of efficiency by recording, timing, and refining the movements that each worker did in performing a given task. Taylor and other proponents of this ideology argued that increasing efficiency and productivity, together with incentivizing workers through increased pay, would solve labor problems.<sup>24</sup> Mather celebrated efficiency through its posters, but viewed the situation differently; it sought to transform the minds and emotions of workers, to inculcate them with the right attitudes and ideas, and thus resolve the seemingly intractable problems between labor and capital.

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17 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

18 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 35, Folder 2, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

19 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 13, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

20 Ibid.

21 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 5, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

22 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

23 Ibid.

24 Frederick Winslow Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1913), 34.



Even a few years earlier, such poster campaigns might not have been advisable due to the volatility of workplace relations. But the 1920s marked a new period of fewer strikes, higher wages, and an apparent easing of tensions between workers and employers. Historian David Montgomery asserts that workplace postings had been the object of considerable scorn by skilled workers in the 19th century, who had viewed them as evidence of a badly run, disorganized workplace.<sup>25</sup> Yet by the 1920s, circumstances had changed so dramatically that Mather's products found wide acceptance, and only the economic freefall of the Great Depression halted their use.

This project will explore four significant themes, distinct and ostensibly unrelated, which nonetheless constituted a coherent ideology that the Mather posters and workplace materials promulgated and reinforced. The first section will discuss *drifting*, a term used to describe a worker moving from job to job, and its attendant problems. The second section will consider the notion of luck, which the posters roundly condemned, and its relationship to fairness, merit, and a belief in an orderly universe, values that Mather materials pointedly affirmed. The third section will explore rumor spreading, and the regulation of appropriate workplace discourse. The fourth section will explore negative feelings and the posters' insistence on proper emotional control in workers. Mather determined that these problematic attitudes and actions eroded group harmony, and asserted that only masculine self-discipline could restore the group cohesion that employers desired.

### III. Drifting and Its Discontents

Labor turnover, a phrase that Mather often used to refer to drifting, was a major problem for employers during the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> But it was not simply the financial consequences of labor turnover that they found so vexing; drifting also imperiled group cohesion. Earlier workplace experts had identified the drifter as problematic, describing such a worker as "the restless, nomadic type who wants to 'go somewhere'... Possible advances in pay or promotion seem to have little or no effect upon this type."<sup>27</sup> The Mather posters and accompanying pamphlets emphasized the perilous position of workers who refused to work in a rooted and disciplined way; drifters with their undisciplined thoughts could only hope for a bleak and hopeless existence, according to Mather.

A worker's individual wanderings violated Mather's underlying ideal of communal rootedness; drifting physically separated individuals from the group, disrupting the possibility of cohesion and unity. The poster *Everywhere Is Nowhere* (fig. 2) warns workers of the consequences of drifting. It features an old prospector, grim but dignified, leading his donkey across a featureless plain. His efforts to find sudden riches have led to a lonely life. Unmoored from friends, family, or home he wanders, doomed to a life of "always starting over." The poster offers a message of hope to this drifter; "Your opportunity is here," it says, promising to save this hapless character from a squandered life. By linking the image of the drifter with the image of a failed prospector, the poster also makes a powerful argument about the dangers of relying on chance, visually connecting the notions of drifting and luck. Wealth, in the Mather universe, was the result of

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25 David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 186.

26 Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 170.

27 Frank, B. and Lillian M. Gilbreth, "How to Increase Production," *The Independent ... Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 102, no. 3725 (Jun 12, 1920): 354, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/89972672?accountid=14496>.

steady, diligent work, based in skilled labor and disciplined rootedness. The prospector is the wrong kind of man, a lonesome, slightly tragic figure. In this poster Mather represents drifting as a selfish act, which dooms the drifter and also undermines the group. The drifter is not celebrated for his rugged individualism; rather he is held up as a warning of what will come to men who do not stay put and find meaning in communal undertakings.

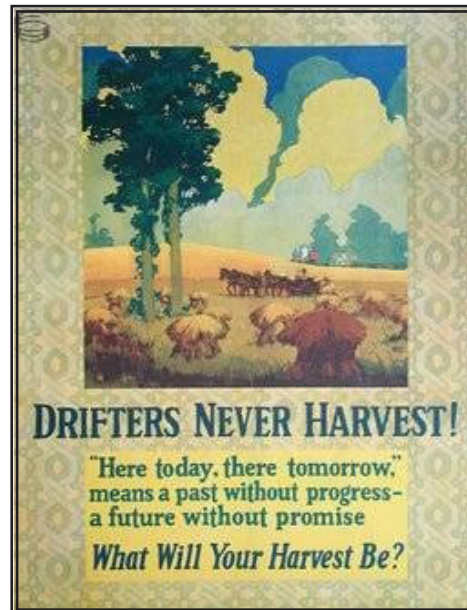
FIGURE 2

EVERYWHERE IS NOWHERE



FIGURE 3

DRIFTERS NEVER HARVEST



*Drifters Never Harvest* (fig. 3) offers a similar sentiment, but with a strikingly different visual emphasis: a peaceful agrarian scene. Piles of hay suggest a bountiful harvest, an abundant reward for dignified labor. The image recalls older ideas of work and success. Against this scene the text stands in striking contrast. In ominous tones it warns, “Drifters Never Harvest. ‘Here today there tomorrow’ means a past without progress—a future without promise. *What Will Your Harvest Be?*” The poster offers a celebration of diligent, rooted work and a warning that refusal to work in such a manner will lead to a bleak and hopeless future. The text asks the viewer to consider his own future, and plays on possible fears and anxieties he may have about himself. Displaying a farmscape and rural imagery, it presents idealized images of work to what was likely an overwhelmingly urban, industrial workforce.

A Mather sales pamphlet entitled “His Double Is On Your Payroll,” which was sent to employers to boost interest in the poster *Drifters Never Harvest* (fig. 3), provides a glimpse into the workplace ideology that the company promoted.<sup>28</sup> The pamphlet features a kind of parable about a fictional worker named Bill Todd, a drifter who lacks discipline and focus, and so becomes discontented with each job, drifting from place to place. The pamphlet describes Bill Todd as possessing “the features of a rather good, swift-fingered mechanic who, if he were given any reason to put his mind to it, might quickly become a skilled craftsman.” This opportunity is almost lost, however, because his unfocused mind has led to poor work and, as a result, a conflict with his foreman, Barrett, who “jacked him up” over a batch of poorly made “machinings.” This

28 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 7, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

confrontation likely represents a challenge to Bill Todd's masculinity. The aggressive behavior of his foreman also represents an older, more authoritarian workplace strategy. Bill Todd's disordered thoughts have precluded his becoming a skilled artisan, disrupted workplace harmony, and led directly to the workplace problem of drifting. "Bill was restless again... so his thoughts ran along while his fingers set the jigs."<sup>29</sup>

He is saved from drifting discontentedly in search of another job and harmony among the workers is preserved by his receiving the right message. As he absentmindedly works, the poster *Drifters Never Harvest* (fig. 3) catches his eye. "All at once his eye fell on a striking object on the far wall of his department, and in among his hazy thoughts three words registered with the jolt of a slammed door... 'Drifters Never Harvest.... drifters never harvest... *drifters never harvest*.' Bill Todd thought, 'Well that's the dope.'" He realizes the error of his ways, reflects on his past actions, and sets himself on a path to redemption. This process mirrors a Protestant paradigm of sudden conversion and salvation. "By the end of that week, Bill Todd, Floater Extraordinary, had made one of those turning-point resolutions that transform near-men into *men*... He would STAY with that job and make good and CLIMB UP... Bill Todd had at last cast anchor!"<sup>30</sup> His transformation into a self-disciplined, successful worker is inextricably bound to his becoming a real man. Although the poster highlights the harvest imperiled by rootlessness, the materials that Mather used to promote this poster placed men and ideas of masculinity at the center of its argument. Real work could only be performed by real men.

The Mather sales materials devoted considerable space to detailing the importance of creating a harmonious, stable workplace environment. Companies who used the Mather posters reported in glowing terms an increase in group amicability. "We are starting to regain the harmony and co-operation from our employees that formerly existed before they were affected by the present day restlessness," affirmed a representative from an unnamed rubber company from San Francisco.<sup>31</sup> "There is a more settled feeling wherein more of the help-the-other-fellow spirit is being displayed," asserted a representative from a knit goods manufacturer from Cleveland.<sup>32</sup> These observations were probably made in 1927, not known as a banner year for labor unrest. Beyond the financial costs associated with labor turnover, beyond even absent-minded work or poor production, drifting represented a threat to harmony within the four walls of the factory. Drifting did not threaten the relationships between workers and management, but rather it threatened harmony among workers and the communalism that so many Mather posters sought to create. Although the oblique references to the "present restlessness" and "a more settled feeling" provoke difficult questions as to the nature of industrial relations during this period, they do allow us to observe the concerns of businessmen.

The poster *All Who Work Seriously Celebrate Labor Day* (fig. 4) links masculinity and communalism in a celebration of spatial fixity. At first glance, this poster, which presents an idealized nineteenth century artisan, does not seem to be about communalism at all. Rather it seems to celebrate the individual worker. But the text unites all workers, even all citizens in a celebration of dedicated labor. This poster celebrates the masculinity and success that drifters can never achieve. In contrast to the posters that warn against drifting, *All Who Work Seriously Celebrate Labor Day* trumpets the success and dignity available to diligent workers. The text, broadly inclusive, unifies blue collar and white collar workers, as well as men and women. The language conjures up the idea of all workers, united together in a common identity. At the center

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.



of a harmonious group stands a self-disciplined masculine figure. This burly, shirtless artisan is a skilled worker whose ability and correct attitude have won him independence and dignity. Through hard work he has mastered himself and his craft, found success, and taken his place in a group that cuts across class, gender, and geographic region. His self-discipline and powerful masculinity have fostered group harmony. The type of worker celebrated in this poster was largely a thing of the past by the 1920s, replaced by increasingly technologically sophisticated machines and assembly lines. The skills that conferred this worker independence and status were an anachronism, a throwback to a bygone era.<sup>33</sup> This poster uses an outdated notion of manly labor to inspire mass production workers to strive for communal contentment and masculine self-mastery.

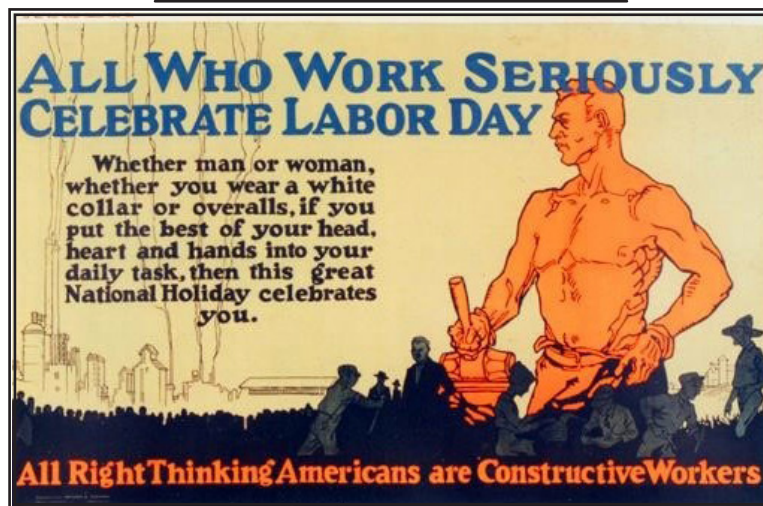
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FIGURE 4

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ALL WHO WORK SERIOUSLY CELEBRATE LABOR DAY

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#### IV. Rationalizing Chaos: Fairness and Merit in an Ordered Universe

Historian Jackson Lears notes a dramatic division in American history between what he calls the cultures of chance and the cultures of control.<sup>34</sup> Many Mather posters condemned a reliance on luck, seeking instead to sell workers on the notion of a fair, meritorious universe. Although reliance on luck was not listed as a specific theme among the many workplace ills that Mather identified, there were repeated references, both pictorial and textual, that warned against dependence on chance. The categories of workplace ills that Mather diagnosed were fluid and interconnected. Many posters that primarily addressed other workplace problems also strongly condemned a reliance on luck. Trusting in chance was a disordered strategy that an unmanly worker pursued, drawing himself away from others in reclusive despondency or indulgent fantasy, undermining group harmony.

Mather repeatedly affirmed the idea that trusting in chance led to failure and unhappiness just as surely as drifting did. In *Lazy Man's Luck* (fig. 5) a haggard loner hunches over his fishing pole, scowling at the water. The imagery of the poster - the man's shabby clothes and weary, discontented countenance - links him to the drifter as well. Untethered from home or workplace,

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850 - 1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Viking, 2003), 2.

he is alone. The black background communicates a dismal mood. “Shirkers land no prizes.” The language of the poster squarely condemns relying on luck, warning of an empty future: “Those who turn in ‘blank’ results pull out ‘blank’ futures.” The “Shirker” is a lazy man who has relied on luck rather than disciplined, masculine hard work. He has not engaged in his work with the proper spirit, and so has not earned the leisure and enjoyment that fishing usually evokes. His future is uncertain and his present is unsatisfying and empty because he has shirked; by not faithfully working, he has robbed himself of a happy future. The image strikingly resembles the cover of a *Saturday Evening Post* (fig. 6) published just a few years earlier. In both images, the men sit and fish, lost in their thoughts, isolated from other people, work, or even a sense of time or season. There is, however, a key difference. Whereas *Lazy Man’s Luck* squarely condemns the man in the poster, the man on the cover of *Saturday Evening Post* looks contemplative, relaxed, lost in his thoughts and in the pleasure of solitude. The title framing him says simply “Contentment.” *Lazy Man’s Luck* warns of solitary pleasure, time spent in individual, unproductive labor, whereas *Saturday Evening Post* celebrates it.

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FIGURE 5

LAZY MAN’S LUCK

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FIGURE 6

SATURDAY EVENING POST

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Mather affirmed the power of masculine determination, sticking to a path, and not becoming distracted by false opportunities and feminine anxiety. A pamphlet addressed and distributed to workers entitled “Going—Where?” stresses that these values were necessary for creating a strong harmonious group. It dismisses people who “drift along” in life and suggests that “sticking to the ‘main chance’” and ignoring the “lure of glittering gold” will lead to success and a happy life.<sup>35</sup> The pamphlet tells the fictional story of Hans Olsen and his wife Hannah, pioneers trying to make their way to Dakota. In the story Hannah falls sick, and they are forced to drop behind their wagon train. All seems lost, but Hans determinedly stays on his westward course. Hannah, fearful and emotional, tries repeatedly to convince him to go off in different directions that appear more promising. He is unswayed, and eventually they are found by members of the wagon train that had left them behind earlier on the journey. By staying on the right path, they

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35 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 14, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

are reunited with their group. Alone they had struggled, narrowly avoiding starvation, but once they find their group they are saved. They set up their homestead and stick it out year after year, even in the face of misfortune and ruined harvests, while others "drift away."<sup>36</sup> It affirms the power of the group and of individuals surviving and thriving through diligent effort rather than taking a chance and hoping for the best.

Mather placed luck and work in opposition, as incompatible forces, repeatedly offering gender critiques as a means of underscoring its messages; only the weak, effeminate, selfish type of fellow eschewed hard work, and placed his faith in fortune. In *Wish Or Work* (fig. 7) a young man leans back precariously in his chair, arms crossed, with his feet up on the desk that he should be bent over in serious, committed labor. His hair is slightly disheveled, and his body language communicates a lackadaisical attitude. He is clothed in a purple suit, which stands out in striking contrast to the yellow background. The color of the suit does little to communicate that he is a serious, sober, deserving worker. The text reads, "Those who really want a thing always work until they get it. Pluck Makes Luck." This man has thrown in his lot with chance. He is a foolish fellow, not deserving of success, not a true man. He has violated the laws of steady, sober work, of diligent striving in an ordered world and represents the kind of man who tries to skate by in life, relying on luck, unwilling to bend his back in true, dignified labor. The outrageous suit offers an example of the wrong kind of man wearing the wrong kind of clothes. He is alone in the image, not deserving of the sustaining friendships celebrated in other posters.

FIGURE 7  
WISH OR WORK

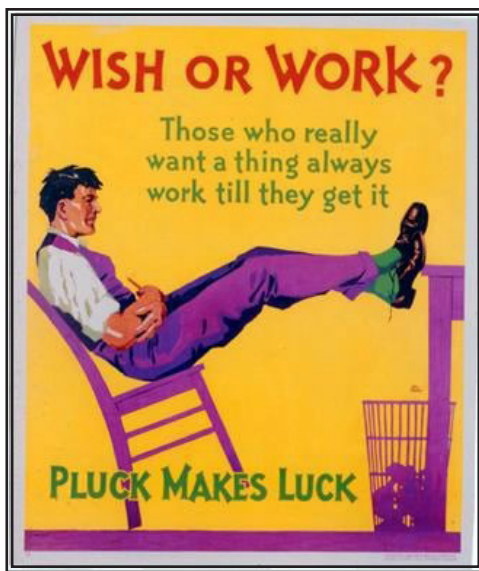
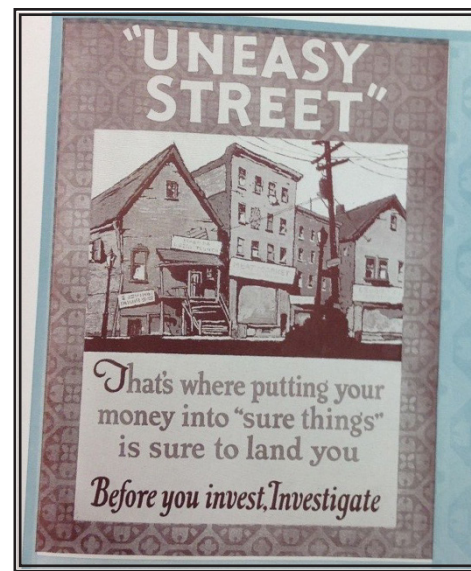


FIGURE 8  
UNEASY STREET



In response to the rapidly escalating number of Americans who invested during this period, some posters dealt more directly with the risks of relying on chance, luck, and wealth not earned through merit and steady work. Reliance on luck or hoping to win gains that one didn't earn sowed disorder that was a threat to the rationality and control that were integral to group harmony. The poster "*Uneasy Street*" (fig. 8) warns against the "sure thing" and implies that the only thing that one can rely on is hard work. The text reads, "Uneasy Street - that's where putting

36 Ibid.



your money into ‘sure things’ is sure to land you. Before you invest, investigate.”<sup>37</sup> The poster warns that blindly hoping for a sudden windfall is foolish and risky. The poster catalogue description offers more insight into how Mather viewed this trend. “Loan sharks, fake stock salesmen, gold-brick artists—not only defraud your ‘easy’ worker, but defraud you who continue to pay him for worry instead of work! This timely poster’s warning insures control and profits no Firm can afford to lose!”<sup>38</sup> The disordered financial dealings of workers led inevitably to disordered minds, set upon by worry. Even diligent workers, caught up in unsavory financial schemes became, through their disordered actions, unsuitable and undeserving workers. One kind of chaos bred another, leading to ruin for the worker, and lost productivity for the company.

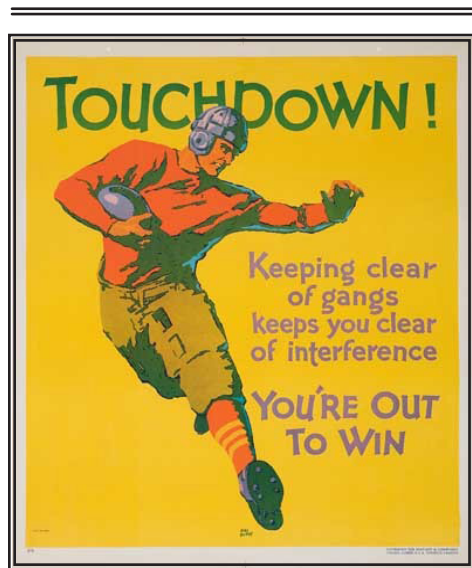
Speculation, gambling, or relying on luck could disrupt group harmony in two ways. Those who lost would become distracted or worried, as the catalogue warned. Those who won would have found fortune, not through hard work and playing by the rules, but by random chance. This would engender resentment among others, and erode the group harmony that the posters sought to create. Receiving random fortune violated a fundamental notion of fairness that group cohesion required. Several posters celebrating the notion of fairness did not address luck specifically, but affirmed fairness as an orderly process that fostered group harmony, for instance *Touchdown!* (fig. 9), *All Together Pull* (fig. 11), and *A Just Decision* (fig. 12). These posters also featured powerful expressions of masculinity, which emphasized its connection to order and fair play.

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FIGURE 9

TOUCHDOWN

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Many posters that explicitly and implicitly condemned luck through a celebration of merit featured sports imagery, which is not surprising given that the 1920s have been called the Golden Age of Sport, and that an important aspect of welfare capitalism was the company sports team. These posters, which featured football, tug-of-war, baseball, boat races, basketball, and other athletic events, celebrated masculine teamwork and solidarity. Even though some posters highlighted individual athletes, and seemed to extol personal effort, they frequently did so within a group context. For example, the poster *Touchdown!* (fig. 9) asserts that “Keeping clear of gangs

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37 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 3, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

38 Ibid.

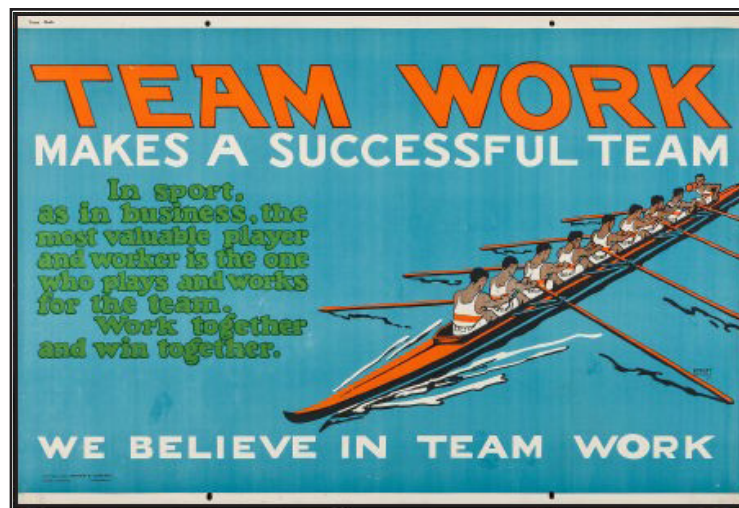
keeps you clear of interference. You're Out to Win," and appears to urge workers to avoid forming relationships with each other and instead to strive for personal success. On the surface, this poster seems to offer a full-throated celebration of individualism. However, the problem that it identifies is not the team, or the group in the broadest sense, but "gangs," small subsets of cliquish individuals who undermine group harmony by separating themselves from the imagined team. Only the powerful determination of the idealized masculine football player can avoid these clannish problems, reestablish group harmony, and achieve success for all.

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FIGURE 10

TEAMN WORK MAKES A SUCCESSFUL TEAM

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The group striving that Mather repeatedly affirmed could only exist through the exquisitely coordinated self-discipline of its members, and their manly cooperation. A potent celebration of group harmony, *Team Work Makes A Successful Team* (fig. 10), features a crew rowing in perfect unison. The text affirms, "Work together and win together," celebrating cooperative effort to achieve collective ends. The concept of self-discipline was important because, once in place, workers could monitor and discipline each other within the framework of group cohesion and peer pressure. A passage from a Mather sales script reveals the power that peer pressure could have. The script describes how "Workers adopt slogans from the headlines of the Poster, when Jim sees Jack knocking off 5 or 10 minutes before quitting time, Jim calls out, 'Hey, Jack, The Game is won in the Ninth Inning.' He honestly kids Jim to put in a real day's work..."<sup>39</sup> Workers who regulated themselves would not need the constant monitoring of a foreman or supervisor to enforce workplace rules and proper habits. The disharmonious dynamic of a foreman "jacking up" drifter Bill Todd would be avoided. It was Mather's goal that through repeated viewings of the posters, workers would urge each other to correct behavior, jokingly correct bad habits, and thus restore and maintain a convivial, productive environment in the workplace.

Such cohesion could only exist in an ordered workplace, in which all workers labored together. Any hint of a worker not exerting himself fully could profoundly undermine the sense of collective striving. Group harmony relied on all workers observing and accepting a fundamental notion of fair play; obedience to this principle assured unity. *All Together Pull* (fig. 11) represents a powerful combination of disciplined masculinity and group cohesion. This poster features a tug-

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39 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



of-war contest. Eight strapping men strain under the effort of their task, committing themselves fully to the game. A ninth man winks at the viewer, only appearing to help his fellow teammates. He is every bit as strong as they are, but refuses to perform his tasks fully. His actions violate a basic notion of fairness, and disrupt the group harmony that might otherwise exist. He imperils the group's efforts through his laziness and unwillingness to work. A proper, self-disciplined man would engage fully in his tasks, whether in a game of tug-of-war or on the assembly line. In the poster his fellow workers are the victims of his selfishness, not his supervisor or manager. Although he is powerful and manly, he represents a cautionary example of wrong behavior, just as the purple suited dilettante does in *Wish or Work* (fig. 7). He pretends to be the right kind of man, but his deception will soon be revealed. The catalogue description for another poster, *A Just Decision* (fig. 12), also reveals the importance that Mather placed on the notion of fairness as the basis for group harmony. "Nothing contributes more strongly to departmental harmony than the spirit of fair play on the part of workers. It is that attitude which this poster forcefully inspires - thereby directly increasing your business volume and net profits!"<sup>40</sup> In the poster, two men play basketball while a referee oversees and sanctions each move, ensuring that their play is ordered, controlled, fair, and harmonious.

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FIGURE 11

ALL TOGETHER-PULL

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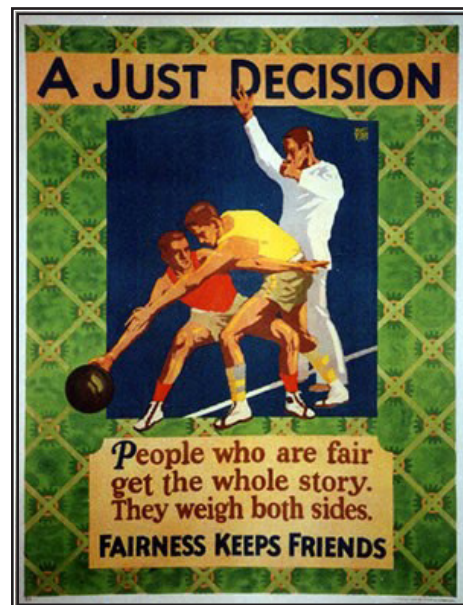


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FIGURE 12

A JUST DECISION

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One of only a few Mather posters that used military imagery, *For Merit* (fig. 13) glorifies discipline, group cohesion, and masculinity, binding such ideals to patriotism. The rest of the text reads, "The efficient worker is always honored. His merit is recognized by all. Stand out from the crowd!" This poster elevates and honors efficiency, a form of self-control, above all else. It ostensibly celebrates individual achievement, yet there are few organizations that evoke group identity more powerfully than the military. In this poster the individual is celebrated because he manages to "stand out from the crowd," a recognition of individual striving. Although he stands out from the group, his success is only meaningful in relation to the group. *All Together Pull* (fig. 11), *A Just Decision* (fig. 12), and *For Merit* (fig. 13) do not discuss the notion of luck specifically,

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40 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 13, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

but affirm the power of its opposite: controlled, meritorious striving. Whether featuring the metaphors of simple games or military success, Mather affirmed that the fundamental idea of fairness, as well as self-disciplined masculinity, was necessary to sustain group cohesion.

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FIGURE 13

FOR MERIT

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## V. Regulating Speech in the Workplace: Rumors, Gossip, and the Spread of Discontent

A key aspect of Mather's ideology revolved around what it saw as one of the biggest threats to the harmonious functioning of the group: unregulated speech. The company viewed various forms of workplace communication as troubling, but none so much as rumor spreading, because it disrupted harmony and goodwill among workers. The catalogue description for *Is It True?* (fig. 14) states, "You know how quickly a few unfounded rumors can upset morale, arouse antagonisms, and hamper quantity and quality of work. Broadcasting the better way—truth telling—kills the Gossiping evil and insures harmony that multiplies results!"<sup>41</sup> The emphasis on the need to "[kill] the Gossiping evil" that might destroy harmony among workers reveals the degree to which Mather was preoccupied with preserving group unity. *Is It True?* features two men: the older man, steady and respectable, sternly rebukes a younger man, who seems uncertain and easily influenced. He has attempted to share a rumor with the older man, provoking an unfavorable reaction. The text reads, "When someone says, 'They say—' ask, 'Who?'— Nail idle gossip Get

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41 Ibid.

The Truth!” Even a poster such as this one, which appears to have little to do with communalism, seeks to protect it by encouraging proper masculine behavior.

FIGURE 14

IS IT TRUE?

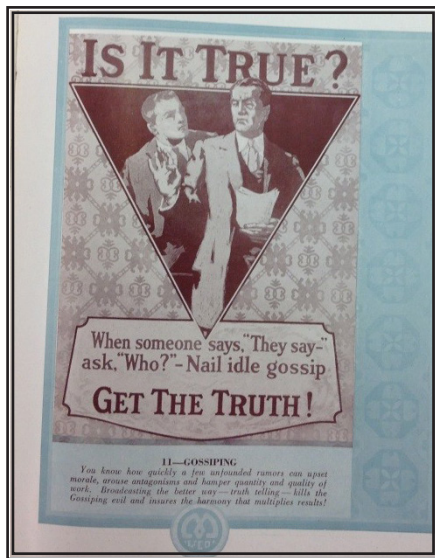
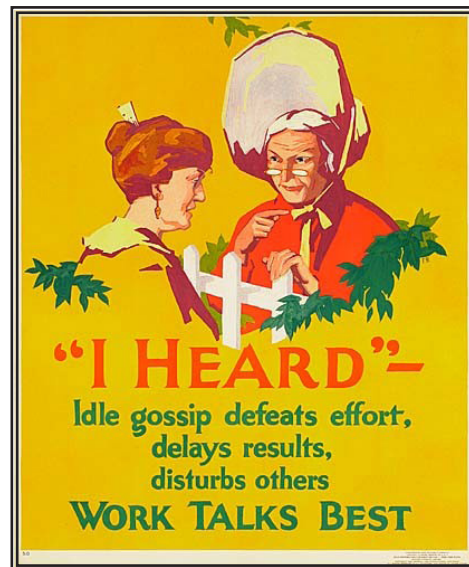


FIGURE 15

I HEARD



Mather presented gossip and rumor spreading in contradictory terms: either as the foolish pastime of old ladies, or as a destructive wildfire that consumed everything in its path. *I Heard* (fig. 15), a poster condemning rumor spreading, offers a pointed gender critique through its pictorial element, which features two old women gossiping across a fence. Thus rumor spreading is framed as the spiteful chatter of two old biddies, not the type of activity that real men engage in. The text reads, “Idle gossip defeats effort, delays results, disturbs others. Work Talks Best.” The poster also condemns workplace communication more broadly, disparaging the notion that workers might have legitimate cause to talk with each other. Likely this was meant to blunt union incursions, but it also defined the appropriate way for workers to communicate. Any deviation from this represented a lack of masculinity and self-control as well as a threat to the group ethos that Mather sought to establish.

The idea that workers’ loss of control is a destructive force recurs frequently in the Mather posters through portrayals of waste, inefficiency, or careless and dangerous work habits. A Mather “Heart-to-Heart” pamphlet entitled “Like Wildfire” describes how a rumor spreads because of one careless act, resulting in catastrophe and destruction.<sup>42</sup> It opens with the story of a wildfire and then goes on to instruct workers, in five easy steps, how to deal with rumors in order to smother them before they become dangerous. “When all of us honestly answer these questions whenever we are tempted to walk up to our neighbors with a remark commencing, ‘I heard,’ or ‘They say,’ we shall be protecting everyone—including ourselves—against the damage that always follows a rumor...”<sup>43</sup> These instructions focus on prevention of rumor spreading, but more importantly express an ideology of how workers should communicate with each other in order to create group harmony. Like the posters that warn against rumor spreading, the multi-step process outlined in the pamphlet would also have likely limited many other forms of workplace speech and worker

42 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 14, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

43 Ibid.



communication in the name of maintaining order and safety. It went far beyond merely curbing gossip; it established firm standards for appropriate workplace speech.

FIGURE 16

THE BLIND TRAIL

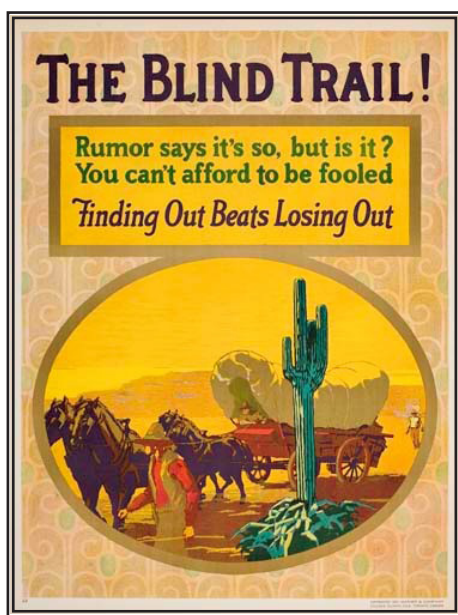


FIGURE 17

SPIKE IT!



*The Blind Trail!* (fig. 16) presents the bleak future that listening to rumors can lead to. The dominant image in the poster is a cactus, signaling that the setting is far from safety, home, and comfort. A man walks alongside a wagon, grimly determined. The title suggests that he is following a “blind trail” without first determining where it will lead. In such an unforgiving landscape, this kind of reckless action endangers the man and his fellow travelers, spelling disaster for all. The text reads: “Rumor says it’s so, but is it? You can’t afford to be fooled. Finding out beats losing out.” The message of the poster is that men need to distinguish truth from rumor using will, intelligence, and self-control. Doing so ensures the success of the group; failure to do so leads to catastrophe. The catalogue description for *The Blind Trail!* also emphasizes the threat that rumor spreading poses to group harmony. It promises that the poster “checks against the wild stories and trouble talk that, unless quickly stopped, create loss, confusion, and bad feeling in any organization.”<sup>44</sup> Mather identified rumors as a cause of ill will in an organization, placing this problem on the same level of importance as financial loss.<sup>45</sup>

Not surprisingly, Mather produced numerous posters seeking to regulate other forms of workplace speech. Deploying the imagery of masculine power and communal effort, *Spike It!* (fig. 17) instructs workers on the proper method of offering criticism. Two musclebound workers wield sledgehammers, utterly absorbed in their task. The poster asserts, “When we [criticize], let’s show how to fix the faults we find.” This defines the only way in which workers may discuss workplace problems. The final line of the poster offers a false choice, affirming that workers can either “Approve or Improve.” The poster extols a highly regulated method of communicating in the workplace, using a celebration of disciplined masculinity to bolster its claims. Since rumor spreading and uncontrolled speech in the form of inappropriate criticism threatened group

44 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 13, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

45 Ibid.

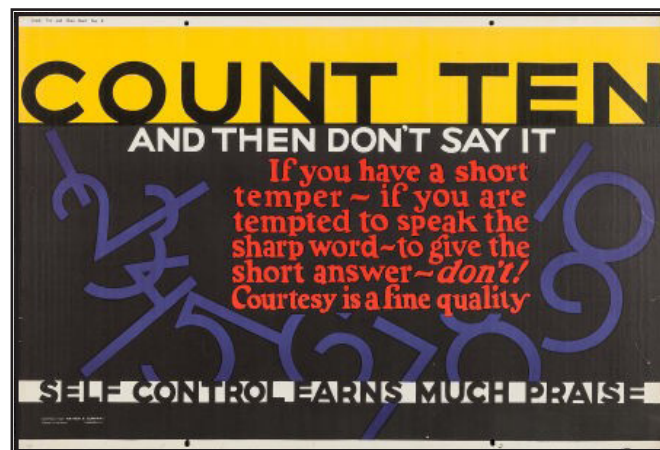
cohesion, defining, regulating, and limiting these most personal aspects of a worker's day was of the utmost importance to Mather's vision of manly self-mastery.

## VI. Celebrating Self-Control: the Mastering of Emotions

Instructing workers on proper emotional control by urging them to both contain explosive outbursts of anger and calm the internal corrosion of worry was key to Mather's vision of masculine harmony. Carefully disciplined speech was central to this vision. *Count Ten And Then Don't Say It* (fig. 18) urges workers to control their anger. The text reads, "If you have a short temper—if you are tempted to speak the sharp word—to give the short answer—*don't!* Courtesy is a fine quality. Self Control Earns Much Praise." The pictorial aspects of the poster are little more than a jumble of the numbers one through ten, representing the chaos of wild emotions. Controlling one's emotional expression leads to group acceptance, and a worker's ability to hold his temper is promised the reward of "much praise."

FIGURE 18

COUNT TEN AND THEN DON'T SAY IT



The binding together of emotional self-control, masculinity, and group harmony that Mather advocated was also an important theme in the 1925 best-selling book *The Man Nobody Knows*, written by advertising executive Bruce Barton.<sup>46</sup> This book re-imagines the life of Jesus Christ; instead of being the milquetoast weakling depicted in church paintings and Sunday school books, he is described as a tawny, strapping man's man, who spends time outside in nature. The text repeatedly celebrates Jesus for holding his temper in the face of insults and slights, when lesser men might lose control and indulge in anger. Barton ties Jesus's masculinity to his strength, vigorous physicality, and self-control. These qualities allow him to create group harmony among an odd assortment of men, who otherwise would not have cohered at all. His influence is so powerful that even after his death his ragged band of followers is able to spread his message throughout the world.

Emotional outbursts were not the only loss of emotional control that Mather focused on; distracted anxiety was equally troubling. *Don't Worry till It Happens* (fig. 19) warns of the dangers

<sup>46</sup> Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1925).



of losing emotional control—not through explosive anger, but through debilitating worry. The pictorial elements of the poster feature a young woman, lost in her disordered thoughts, consumed with worry about things that will never come to pass. “Worries about things that never happen cause more unhappiness than real troubles. Everything is for the Best,” the poster reassures. Just as an optimistic, disciplined worker could expect fair rewards and a predictable set of rules governing the universe, a disordered, out of control worker could expect the very outcomes that he feared. The use of a woman in this poster is also telling; it provides a not-so-subtle expression of the perception of the destructive power of women’s irrationality. The woman in the poster is young and pretty, but she sits huddled and alone, surrounded by the monsters and ghouls of her wandering mind.

Worry itself was a curious problem for employers to concern themselves with. It is clear why workers who lost their temper might be of concern, because angry outbursts could disrupt workflow. But worry is personal and private; it does not lead to the kinds of emotional eruptions that other posters warned against. It was the private nature of worry, the internal preoccupation, which Mather sought to curb. Just as a drifting worker was a threat to workplace stability and harmony, so, too, was the mental drift of a worker’s worry a violation of these ideals. Worry drew a person away from the group, into his own private mind, and away from work. In an issue of the Kodak employee magazine from 1922, a humorous anecdote about the pointlessness of worry suggests that it was a topic of concern for employers. “Take it From Finnegan” is a little story about Finnegan, a recent Irish immigrant, who worries about a job and becomes exhausted from dreading it before he even starts.<sup>47</sup> It is a gently chiding moral tale about how hard work is less exhausting than worry. Finnegan is a source of humor who provides an example of how not to go about one’s work. He is not the right kind of worker, and most certainly not the right kind of man.

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FIGURE 19

DON'T WORRY TILL IT HAPPENS

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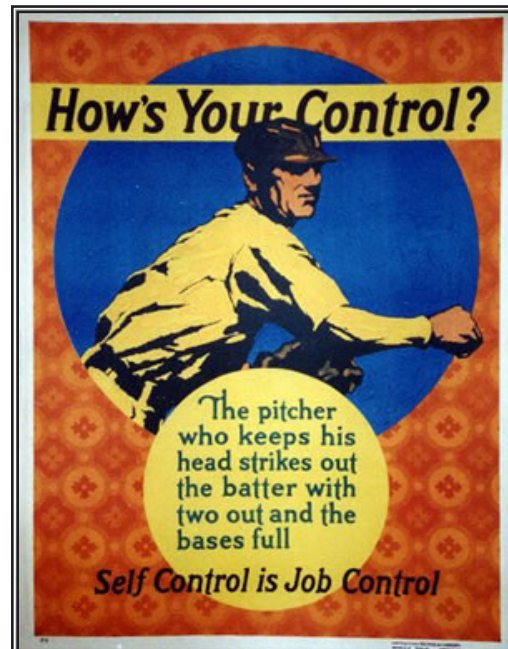



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FIGURE 20

HOW'S YOUR CONTROL

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<sup>47</sup> “Take it from Finnegan,” *The Kodak Magazine* (August 1922): 6, <https://archive.org/stream/kodakmagazine03eastuoft#page/n83/mode/2up>

*How's Your Control?* (fig. 20) explicitly celebrates self-control and self-mastery, highlighting their connection to a particular notion of masculinity. The poster features a pitcher who, with a steady gaze fixed on his goal, exudes masculine calm under pressure. His control of his nerves is what sets him apart from other, lesser men. "The pitcher who keeps his head strikes out the batter with two out and the bases full. Self Control is Job Control." Focused on the matter at hand, he executes his task perfectly. The use of a baseball player is telling as well; his self-control determines whether or not his team will win. The poster explicitly celebrates his individual achievement (self-control) and implicitly celebrates the notion of working together and mutuality. The Mather catalogue lists this poster under the workplace ill of "excitability." It instructs employers that "The worker of most value to you and himself is the cool, level-headed type... who masters emergencies because he is master of himself. Because it teaches this much-needed lesson of self-control, this poster is an invaluable aid to good management."<sup>48</sup>

With varying degrees of subtlety, many Mather posters critiqued unions. Expressing anti-union sentiments in the most direct terms, *Dissatisfied Men Make Everybody Miserable* (fig. 21) also offers a scathing gender critique and a condemnation of individualism. The man featured in the poster is out of control, tormented by his belief that the "world is against him." So potent is his misery that it can make everyone else miserable, too. The zealot who harangues the assembled crowd is at once menacing and irrelevant. His slight frame, his tousled hair, and his vaguely foreign appearance all communicate a decided lack of masculinity. He rants and raves; his "misery" is contagious but he is impotent. An emotionally explosive ideologue, his lack of self-control renders him truly un-masculine. His alienation offers a powerful example of the fate that awaits those who disrupt group harmony with their out-of-control emotions. He is also condemned because "he thinks so much about himself," a subtle but powerful criticism of individualism. In this formulation, the socialist or union rabble-rouser is portrayed as being too individualistic.

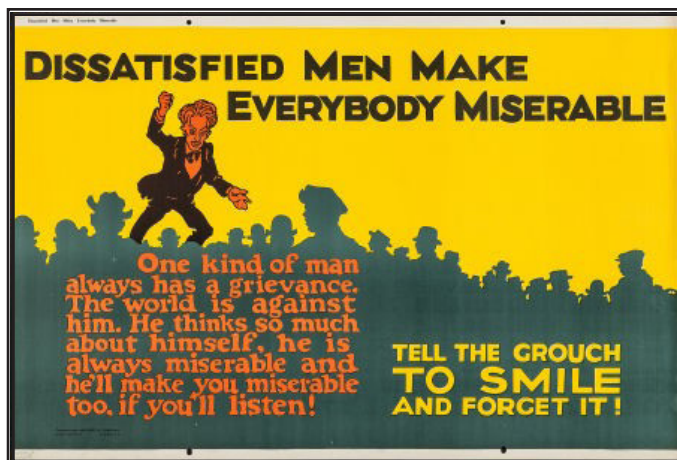
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FIGURE 21

DISSATISFIED MEN MAKE EVERYBODY MISERABLE

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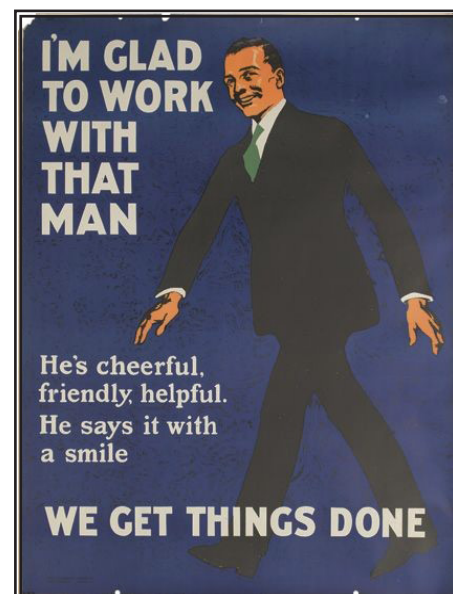

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FIGURE 22

I'M GLAD TO WORK WITH THAT MAN

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48 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 13, Folder 11, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

A striking contrast to *Dissatisfied Men* (fig. 21) can be found in *I'm Glad to Work With That Man* (fig. 22). A grinning, confident man strides across the poster. He smiles warmly, making eye contact with the viewer. He wears a well-tailored suit, and his hair is carefully combed and in place. Everything about his physical appearance communicates order and self-discipline. White and middle-class, he is successful because he understands the need for the self-mastery celebrated in *How's Your Control?* (fig. 20) and *All Who Work Seriously Celebrate Labor Day* (fig. 4). The text reads, "I'm Glad To Work With That Man. He's cheerful, friendly, helpful. He says it with a smile. We Get Things Done." He has mastered his emotions, and as a result has won a place of respect in his group. Others are "glad to work with him" primarily because of his attitude. "He's cheerful, friendly, helpful" — all qualities that foster productive group harmony. He is not celebrated for being strong, passionate, a master craftsman, or any number of other qualities that might elevate a worker. Self-mastery has led to success, but even more importantly, a place of respect in the group. He serves as a model for other men to emulate.

## VII. Conclusion

Rather than employee rulebooks or workplace guidelines, Mather and Company created pamphlets and posters that sold a particular set of values rooted in Protestant notions of order and self-controlled masculinity. Through these materials Mather repeatedly sought to define the conditions needed to create and maintain the proper kind of group, to define the place of the individual within it, and to shape his relationship with his fellow workers. This program of engendering group harmony through workplace propaganda represented a new approach, based on the notion that workers with the correct attitudes would monitor themselves and one another, thereby enhancing productivity and increasing profitability.

Only the thinnest references to workers' reactions to the posters could be located for this project, and they are mostly filtered through Mather sales materials; Mather obviously emphasized positive reactions and omitted negative ones. Among the few surviving letters of complaint, a memo to Mather from Illinois Traction Company offers a glimpse into the way that some workers viewed the posters. The company reported in 1924 of a worker complaint that, "if the company would spend less in propaganda of this kind they could afford to pay better wages" and that this would "do more to secure cooperation."<sup>49</sup> It is impossible to know how common such an assessment was among workers, but clearly some workers were aware of their employers' attempts to shape their attitudes and emotions, and resented them. This worker's discontented attitude about wages represented a worrisome and potentially dangerous problem: such a worker's stubborn reluctance to align his thinking with his employer left him vulnerable to the messages of union organizers. Mather confronted this challenge, not by bullying such workers into meekly allying themselves with their managers or supervisors, but by playing on their loyalty to their fellow workers and their sense of masculinity.

Although organized labor was largely discredited during this period, Mather appropriated labor rhetoric in its posters and pamphlets, while reshaping its meaning. Instead of deploying this rhetoric to transform workplace power dynamics, as unions sought to do, Mather used it to establish workplace harmony and stability, and ultimately to reinforce existing hierarchies. Mather posters and pamphlets did not use the word "solidarity," but they repeatedly affirmed this value

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<sup>49</sup> Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 5, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



through related ideas such as cooperation, teamwork, and group harmony. Mather's emphasis on group loyalty and mutuality seems innocuous and politically neutral, but promulgating such notions was likely not accidental, but rather highly strategic. The radical labor organization Industrial Workers of the World celebrated the power of collectivism in their anthem "Solidarity Forever," written in 1915, sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body."

When the union's inspiration through the workers blood shall run

There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun

Yet what force on Earth is weaker than the feeble force of one but

The union makes us strong.<sup>50</sup>

It is not surprising that the IWW anthem celebrates solidarity, but it is surprising to see this sentiment voiced in a motivational workplace poster. *Think "I" And You Work Alone* (fig. 1) expresses this same sentiment, highlighting the "feeble force of one" through the depiction of a solitary, struggling figure hopelessly attempting to scale a cliff that can only be scaled through cooperative effort. Given the labor volatility during the years leading up to Mather's creation of the poster service, the emphasis on communalism and group loyalty found in the posters is striking. The cohesion and unity that Mather sought to inculcate among workers had the potential to foster the same militancy that had proved so troubling to employers during the previous decades.

A preoccupation with workers' minds, emotions, bodies and loyalties ran through the messages of the posters. A passage from a Mather sales script from 1922 made plain the stakes involved in fostering the right mindset among workers. Addressing a prospective customer the sales script warned, "Your workers buy plenty of destructive thoughts after they leave here at night, in constant association with workers from other plants and thru Labor Organization [sic]... These thots [sic] create actions that are harmful to you. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that you inject Right Thoughts into their minds and create actions that will be profitable to you."<sup>51</sup> Clearly many employers during this period were hostile to the weakened efforts of labor organizers. Yet Mather sought not only to answer labor, but also to burrow its own messages into the minds of workers in part by using labor's own rhetoric. The communalism that Mather envisioned, so similar to the communalism that union organizers articulated, had to be monitored, shaped, and defined. Communalism as Mather saw it could only operate within properly defined boundaries, shaped by notions of masculine self-mastery and group harmony. Allowing group identity to be formed by outside influences was unacceptable.

It is impossible to know the exact number of workers who saw Mather's posters over the course of the 1920s, but given that Mather claimed to have over 22,000 companies as customers, it is conceivable that many hundreds of thousands of workers viewed its messages.<sup>52</sup> Far from a collection of quaint, Benjamin Franklin-esque aphorisms, these posters represented a highly coherent and strategic deployment of workplace ideology. Eugene Debs, speaking at the founding convention of the IWW in 1905, asserted that as workers, "We depend absolutely upon each other.

50 Ralph Chaplin, "Solidarity Forever," in *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology*, edited by Joyce Kornbluh (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 26.

51 Rosenfeld, Charles H. Papers, Box 3, Folder 9, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

52 "Of Course He's Wrong - But He Doesn't Know It," Mather and Company, *The Nation's Business*, March, 1925. Hagley Digital Archive, accessed December 2, 2014. <http://cdm16038.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16038coll3/id/37709>

We must get close together and stand shoulder to shoulder. We know that without solidarity nothing is possible, that with it nothing is impossible."<sup>53</sup> Rather than disparaging this idea, two decades later Mather and Company claimed it as its own, but reshaped its meaning. Concepts such as good workers, efficiency, and teamwork are not neutral terms; they are imbued with political and cultural meanings. Mather and Company, a large and sophisticated organization, waged a concerted campaign to define the meanings of these terms.

Only a few years before, World War I posters had also expressed powerful ideas about work, masculinity, group cohesion and loyalty; these large, colorful, emotionally potent posters had helped to stoke patriotic fervor. The Mather posters likely drew upon the authority that this earlier campaign had created. Mather successfully sold its service up until the economic hardships of the 1930s. During the upheavals of the Great Depression and World War II, poster campaigns, again produced by the government, expressed notions of work, group unity, and gender. The Mather posters and other workplace materials emerged during a relatively calm, prosperous period, compared to what had come before and what came after. Yet despite this apparent tranquility, employers were seeking vigorously to define fundamental notions of worker identity, using new strategies of indirect control.

The worker who complained that his company spent money on propaganda instead of raising wages may have been just one lone voice of discontent, but it was this very type of worker whom employers feared: one of a possible multitude of discontented workers who might sow discord in the ranks, slow down work, join a union, go on strike, quit, or otherwise disrupt production. Mather was not alone in its goal of understanding and influencing workers' minds and emotions; other industrial relations experts during this period were growing increasingly preoccupied with the same concern. The famous Hawthorne experiments, conducted between 1924 and 1933 at the Hawthorne Works of Western Electric by researchers from Harvard Business School, while quite different on the surface from the poster service of Mather and Company, represent a similar interest in the inner lives of workers. While much has been written about the meaning of the results of these experiments, the lesson researchers drew was that harmonious personal relationships were the key to productivity.<sup>54</sup>

Departing from older, more authoritarian forms of labor control, both the Hawthorne experiments and Mather and Company focused instead on indirect, subtle means of shaping workplace dynamics. In Mather's case, it was of the utmost importance to shape workers' ideas about masculinity, self-discipline, and group cohesion. The specifics of this strategy have changed over the ensuing decades, yet this approach has so thoroughly infiltrated our culture that it now seems natural, for instance, that many employers require prospective employees to take personality tests, in an attempt to quantify intangible aspects of their emotional lives.<sup>55</sup> It is also commonplace today for large retailers, companies with thousands or even hundreds of thousands of low-wage employees, to refer to their employees as team members. Yet such practices have not always been the norm; Mather's poster service, a novel idea at the time, was at the beginning of these revolutionary changes. Instead of seeking to transform industrial relations, Mather sought to transform the workers themselves.

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53 Eugene Debs, "Speech at the Founding Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World," Marxist Internet Archive, June 1905, accessed December 2, 2014. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1905/iwwfound.htm>.

54 Richard Gillespie, *Manufacturing Knowledge: A History of the Hawthorne Experiments*, (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), vii.

55 Lauren Weber, and Elizabeth Dwoskin, "Are Workplace Personality Tests Fair?" *Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 2014, sec. Business, accessed December 2, 2014 <http://online.wsj.com/articles/are-workplace-personality-tests-fair-1412044257>.



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