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Governable Travelers: International Comparison in American Tramp Ethnography

BRYAN YAZELL

In *Social Problems*, published in 1883, economist and progressive writer Henry George assesses the various threats plaguing the United States during the fraught period now known as the Gilded Age. Many of the various dangers he decries will look relevant to the modern reader's eyes: Among them, environmental decline due to industrial waste and trenchant poverty are at least as pressing to Americans now as they were in the nineteenth century. One especially severe problem for George, however, may appear less keen to readers today in comparison to these other categories of ecological and social disaster: the "tramp," the wandering vagrant type that confounded legal authorities near the turn of the century. Indeed, to George, the tramp stands out as one of the preeminent social dangers at the time of his writing. "Consider this terrible phenomenon," he observes, "an appearance more menacing to the Republic than that of hostile armies and fleets bent on destruction."¹ Although George saw job shortages as a problem, he understands tramps themselves to be the more dangerous threat. Forced onto the road, the tramp "becomes a vagabond and an outcast — a poisonous pariah, avenging on society the wrong that he keenly, but vaguely, feels has been done him" (179).

George's vilification of the tramp as an existential threat to the country should indicate the extent to which this type embodied the larger economic, social, and political events of that era. Tim Cresswell explains, for example, that over the course of the late nineteenth century the "tramp became the moral panic of the nation."² The stark disparity between the connotative power of the tramp in the nineteenth century and more recent incarnations is telling of a dramatic change in the discursive construction of the archetype. Simply put, the specific version of expansive mobility that the tramp represented to commentators like George no longer connotes preeminent danger. Further, this shift signals a larger transformation in the governability of this population; what once was beyond the pale of civil society is now

normalized inasmuch as it poses no risk to the body politic.

The interdisciplinary process that effectively disarmed this tramp threat is at the center of this article. I take claims such as those contained in *Social Problems* as the point of departure for analyzing how literature that defined tramping assisted the government in exerting greater control over its populations in the face of a problem that spanned continents. George's vilification of the tramp represents one version of this effort inasmuch as it identifies tramps in particular as a population deeply in need of regulation. According to Cresswell, the modern tramp as George understood it came into being in 1875, after the *New York Times* used the term to specifically identify the growing population of unemployed migrants in the US.³ The speed with which the tramp moved to the forefront of political discourse indicates the sweeping social upheaval of the era. Indeed, the boom-and-bust period we refer to as the Gilded Age was inaugurated by the greatest financial collapse in history: what was then known as the Great Depression of 1873. Historians now refer to this economic crash as "the panic of 1873," a name that, as Michael Bellesiles points out, fails to account for the unprecedented scale of the market downturn, surpassed only by the second Great Depression that began in 1929.⁴ Indeed, the scope of the 1873 economic collapse encompassed not only the US but much of Europe as well, including Germany, France, and Britain.⁵

In this context, the emergence of the tramp as an acute social problem reflects what historians understand as a turning point in the public's reception of social welfare regulations in the US. Indeed, various sources have indicated that the years spanning the 1870s saw the country in the throes of a "tramp scare," a sensationalized moral panic spanning the end of the century that, while hinging on the stereotype of the tramp, reflected a greater anxiety about industrialism.⁶ According to Todd DePastino, fearful accounts of tramps in popular media reflected larger anxieties deriving from the unstable economy, which included "struggles between the propertied and unpropertied over the use of public space, fears about the growth of a propertyless proletariat, and anxieties about the loss of traditional social controls in American cities."⁷ The extent of the "tramp scare" was such that, according to Cresswell, tramps "across the country" were "met with verbal and physical abuse from local residents ... pilloried in newspapers and arrested under new laws."⁸ If the public saw the general population of poor as chronically indolent, Bellesiles explains, they saw the tramp as "an all-purpose supercriminal, seemingly capable of every transgression."⁹ Unlike the notion of the downtrodden poor, tramps took on the singular form of all manner of threats facing the healthy functioning of society. While the former are unable to "rescue" themselves from poverty, this logic follows, the latter are constantly on the move in search of what they need to survive outside familiar domestic and economic structures. Owing to this perception, Americans understood vagrancy as a crisis in need of an immediate solution, even as they became accustomed to the idea of long-term and widespread poverty more generally.

The presentation of vagrant types as unhealthy subjects points to a larger

governing discourse that used advancements in both medicine and welfare infrastructure to govern the public health. This governing configuration distinctly recalls the historical moment Foucault describes in *Society Must be Defended* when the rise of scientific models intent on proving biological difference enables a “discourse of power” that casts into tension “the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm” and “those who deviate from the norm ... who pose a threat to the biological heritage.”¹⁰ The nineteenth century is crucial for both Foucault and this article’s presentation of vagrancy because it is during this time that innovations in ethnography, demographic sorting and population surveillance entered into the service of state power. For Foucault, the state that emerges at the end of the nineteenth century—against the backdrop of imperialism and expanding interest in the social applications of natural selection and eugenics—envisions its power as a vehicle for protecting “the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race” (81). Improved methods for tracking vagrants promised to reinforce the social fabric in more ways than one. Most immediately, it satiated the public outcry over the threat tramps were said to pose to society at large. As Bellesiles explains, in the years following the economic downturn of 1873 “the middle class was in the process of constructing an ideology that blamed the poor for their poverty as a moral failing,” a rationale that prompted many Americans to “lash out at the easiest target, the homeless.”¹¹ Subjecting vagrants to regulation therefore entrenched the discourse of power that held the state accountable for protecting the mainstream of society from marginal groups. In this context, tramps are deserving of regulation inasmuch as they harm the health of the body politic. The tools for doing so, as this article will explain, hinge on turning a hitherto ill-defined group of people (the highly mobile tramp) into a quantifiable population for the purposes of control. The development of these tools not only satisfied a pressing public need, but also created better methods for the state’s power of demographic sorting more generally.

If this national panic resulted in antitramp screeds like George’s, it also contributed to major innovations in ethnography and criminology, both emerging technologies in the science of governance. Indeed, implicit in these accounts was a call to jumpstart government reform such that it would catch up to the pressing threat tramps were said to pose to the country. In this article, I locate this transformation in the literature codifying tramps as one distinct component in the larger turn toward the governmental science of demographic study and population management. In particular, this article reads the work of Josiah Flynt, an early and preeminent source on the ethnographic study of tramps, as a key representative of how an international comparison of tramps—and antitramp laws—emerges as the key formal feature for facilitating more robust policy. A collection of participant observation essays, Flynt’s *Tramping with Tramps* in 1899 was the first ever ethnographic account of tramp life in the US.¹² DePastino explains that Flynt’s writings in popular publications, such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Century Magazine*, challenged “the middle-class’s conventional wisdom” about the tramp’s superlative criminality “that had been born during the

crisis years of the 1870s” (49). As I explain throughout, Flynt corrected the sensationalized depiction of the tramp supercriminal by representing vagrants as a demographic group in their own right: In the aggregate, he argues, tramps more closely resemble hard-working Americans than they do shiftless criminals. The goal, Flynt declares in *Tramping with Tramps*, is to bring the misunderstood population “to realize” the “responsibilities” and “opportunities” attendant with operating within the traditional class structure.¹³

While Flynt’s text proposes specific reforms for rehabilitating this population, I am more interested in how the comparative structure of his work assists in the project of population management. Although Flynt understands tramping as a problem for authorities in the US, a great bulk of his text is concerned with the author’s observations of European vagrancy. The narrative structure of his text therefore presents vagrancy in thoroughly comparative terms, a framework that encourages readers to see tramps as representatives of their respective home states. On one level, this rendering acknowledges the international dimensions of the market crashes of the 1870s and the widespread poverty that resulted from these crises. At the same time, this comparative treatment of vagrancy dramatizes how the demographic science Flynt employs is able to delineate an otherwise dispersed group of people. Simply put, *Tramping with Tramps* showcases the extent to which specific vagrant populations change in response to legal codes. Vagrancy provides a test case for policy more generally to the extent that these sources demonstrate the power of normalizing the seemingly intractable tramp problem. Flynt’s tramp writings thus bring into focus a moment when the US, in the throes of a prolonged panic centering on poverty, unemployment, and homelessness, situates vagrancy as one among many multiple—and therefore, administrable—demographics. Ultimately, this turn compels the state not to expel tramps from civil life but to draw them in closer to the minutiae of state administration. If American readers assumed tramps operated outside the law, Flynt’s text emphatically indicated that they are subject to governance; that the shades of difference between foreign and US tramps reflect back on the welfare policies of their respective state. The comparative picture of vagrancy outlined here places Flynt among the shifting tides of social welfare work of the late nineteenth century and the expanding role of the state’s involvement in social control. By treating vagrancy as a matter for statecraft—a manner of thinking about governance that is inherently comparative and international in scope—social works such as Flynt’s facilitate more robust state tools for disciplining otherwise incorrigible groups.

The Internationalism of American Vagrancy

The usefulness of international comparison as a tool for controlling vagrancy extends across a variety of sources during the last decades of the nineteenth century. To name an especially prominent example, Mark Twain gestures to this framework in correspondence advocating stricter antitramp legislation. In a letter written to the

Hartford *Courant* during the composition of his 1880 travelogue, *A Tramp Abroad*, Twain draws on his experiences in Germany to comment on vagrancy measures in the US.¹⁴ The letter notes the implementation of strict antitramp codes and praises the “good news that Hartford has at last ceased to be the Tramp’s haven.” The correspondence cites approvingly the editor’s call to stop all “giving at doors,” for, according to Twain, “any community which will allow tramps to be assisted by its citizens will be sure to have a plentiful harvest of tramps”:

We have a curious proof of this fact here in Munich. You are aware that when our ingenious Massachusetts nobleman, Count Rumford, took high in office here under the Bavarian crown in the last quarter of the last century, he found Bavaria just what Hartford has been for years,—the Tramp’s paradise. Bavaria swarmed with beggars. Count Rumford applied the same remedy which you have lately found so effectual: he provided work for all comers, & then shut square down on all forms of begging. His system has remained in force here ever since. Therefore, for three-quarters of a century Bavaria has had the reputation of being the only country in Europe uncursed by tramps. I have lived here two months & a half, now, & have walked a mile to my work & a mile back again, every day during that time, through a densely populated part of the city, yet I have never once been accosted by a beggar.¹⁵

While Twain had inserted tramp types in his writings before, this letter showcases the underlying internationalism to the representation of tramping in the context of public policy.¹⁶ Munich is an adequate case study for potential new laws in Hartford because, in this telling, tramps are dispersed across Europe and North America alike.¹⁷ At the same time, they are tractable enough in response to strict legislation in local contexts. Indeed, Twain further suggests that regulating tramping along these lines poses benefits to society as a whole. Twain’s letter recalls vagrants who, in the act of soliciting charity, use a “peculiarly deep & sagacious bit of diplomacy” to win their audience’s sympathy.¹⁸ So while Twain rails against legal systems that encourage “tramp-breeding,” he nonetheless refers to the creative tools associated with tramps. Indeed, he further suggests that they possess talents that society is still unable to identify: “I wish an experienced tramp would reform; & expose the means by which tramps acquire their surprisingly minute & accurate information about the inside affairs of families” (SLC to Ed., n. p.). In this telling, there is concrete social value—in the tramp’s performance of “diplomacy” and circulation of “information”—in incorporating vagrants into the social fold. If Bavaria offers a model for legislation, the

letter implies, there is more to be learned about what reforming tramps would mean in the context of the US.

Near the turn of the century, sources in and outside of government were also looking overseas for ways of controlling tramping in the United States. In order to confront this new breed of vagrancy, late–nineteenth century governments in the US revived vagrancy laws that had been “borrowed wholesale from Great Britain” during the colonial period.¹⁹ The extent of British influence on American policy in this case extends well beyond holdovers from the colonial era, however. Rather, British laws written in the nineteenth century provided the crucial template for the anti-vagrancy codes passed in the US in 1876 and after (50). The most prominent of these British laws, the Vagrancy Act of 1824 frames the problem that the tramp would pose much later in the century. Specifically, the law targets vagrants by criminalizing non-productive forms of labor in the broadest terms. According to this act, “an idle or disorderly person” includes “every Person wandering abroad, or placing himself or herself in any public Place, Street, Highway, Court, or Passage, to beg or gather alms.”²⁰ Conflating travel, work, and productivity, the 1824 act provided US lawmakers later in the century with a model for new laws authorizing the arrest of vagrants. In 1876, New Jersey passed an antitramping bill that closely replicated the intentionally broad language of the British code, defining tramps as people who “shall be found going about from door to door, or placing themselves in the streets, highways or roads, to beg or gather alms, and can give no reasonable account of themselves or their business in such places.”²¹ The New Jersey law in turn served as the model for antitramp legislation passed in various other states over the course of the following decade.²² Granting local governments sweeping authority to criminalize the otherwise vague category of vagrancy, these retooled laws also reflect the international basis for vagrancy codes in the United States.

Linking Hartford to Bavaria, Twain’s letter also anticipates the comparative readings of vagrancy policy that would thrive in the last years of the nineteenth century.²³ Examples of sources similarly calling for policy appropriation abound during this period. As a prominent example of this trend, John James McCook took up the call for greater statistical data on the tramp population and undertook an extensive survey of this group. Published in the popular *Forum* journal in 1893, McCook’s “Tramp Census” provided an in-depth look at the lives of vagrants through a series of personal interviews conducted across not only the US, but also England, Germany, and France. The result of this research led McCook to advocate for uniform laws across the country to contain and rehabilitate the worst aspects of the vagrant class.²⁴ Chief among McCook’s reform proposals is the creation of “places of detention ... in which incorrigible vagrants may be committed for indeterminate periods and where they may both learn to work and overcome the habit of idleness.”²⁵ The English casual ward system, along with the German Labor Colony system, provided McCook with models of regulation that, while far from faultless in his eyes, served as useful policies for appropriation.

The call for importing European codes aimed at controlling vagrancy in McCook's "Tramp Census" mirrors similar calls in other reform-minded texts. For instance, Edward Kelly's 1908 *Elimination of the Tramp* decries "the man whose soul breaks down" and consequently moves to commit any number of unsocial acts, from "innocently stealing a ride on a freight car" to "assaulting our women, corrupting our youth, and breeding disease."²⁶ The labor camps Kelly promotes in order to combat this social breakdown in the US are modeled on extant institutions in Switzerland and other European states. According to this reasoning, the problem of the tramp could only be solved when these vagrants found a productive outlet for their exceptional—if illicit—form of movement. The obstacle to implementing these camps, Kelly continues, derives from a social dynamic shared by the US and Britain. "Singularly enough it is the two nations—England and America—in which charity is the most lavish and most highly organised, that have most resolutely refused to adopt the obvious solution to this problem," the labor camp.²⁷ For Kelly, the extensive and complex networks of charity institutions stand in contrast to the streamlined simplicity of the state-mandated labor camp. Solving the tramp problem therefore requires not only a concerted effort on the part of the state to identify vagrant populations; it must also involve directing the state's resources toward rehabilitating, in addition to containing, delinquent laborers. In this telling, international comparison helps to define not only the global circulation of the tramps but also individual state responses for regulating them.

The reform-minded texts of Kelly and McCook, along with Twain's *Courant* letter, are indicative of a consensus that resorts to international comparison in order to better categorize—and consequently, control—the vagrant population in the US. Their writings invite greater governmental oversight of vagrancy by depicting tramps not as sensationalized villains but rather as a distinct demographic population: These sources consequently present aggregate data about where tramps reside (as in McCook's census) as well as various policies already in place in Europe for controlling this movement. Taken together, these exhaustive accounts of the tramp population encompass one discrete turn in the continual processes of innovation at the level of governance. In his study of the creation of the American tramp, Cresswell draws from Ian Hacking's formulation of "dynamic nominalism" to argue that a people come into being at the same time that the literary, legal, and medical descriptors for this community are coined.²⁸ In "Making Up People," Hacking argues that regulatory institutions respond to existential threats by inventing new demographic categories, which effectively create "new ways for people to be."²⁹

The emergence of the tramp persona in the late nineteenth century is especially telling of this process of demographic codification: It may have been only after 1875 that "the tramp" denoted a specific type of vagrant person, but by the end of the century this designation loomed large in the minds of popular writers and social scientists alike. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose in *Governing the Present* outline the especial insight we gain from analyzing the contours of specific subclasses of the

population. As Miller and Rose explain, the “activities of the minor figures” are most demonstrative of the science of governance, without which states could not “govern at all.”³⁰ As one historical version of vagrancy, the tramp provides a case study in the ways governmental institutions create, administer, and refigure specific demographic groups as a means for regulating the health of the general population. As an object of study, vagrancy as a social construct foregrounds the role that sources in popular culture and government alike played in reinforcing the political regimes coming into shape at this time. While we might look back on the tramp as a minor figure among the more sweeping changes of the early twentieth century, this ostensibly marginal status only reinforces the usefulness of this figure as an object of inquiry.

Vagrant Demographics: Reform at Home, Travel Abroad

When we examine the tramp, then, we see traces of an interdisciplinary effort to delineate and categorize distinct populations among the growing class of unemployed and homeless. Josiah Flynt contributed more to this effort of visualizing the tramp in the public and legal eye in the US than any other author of his day. Beginning his ethnographic observations in 1891, Flynt had become the “nation’s premier expert on tramps” after publishing this work in a collected volume, *Tramping with Tramps*, the era’s authoritative account of the vagrant population in the US and abroad.³¹ He would later make his literary aspirations especially clear, following *Tramping with Tramps* (1899) with the publication of the novel *The Little Brother* (1902), a fictional account of vagabondage in the US. As this last point suggests, Flynt’s work reflects in a singular case the interdisciplinary preoccupation with the lives of tramps during this era. In view of this dynamic, DePastino places Flynt among the likes of Jack London in popularizing “the genre of cross-class undercover investigation” at a time when the “tramp comedy” was a popular subject of mass-market literature and the vaudeville stage (162). Flynt’s text assisted readers looking for answers to the tramp problem inasmuch as it identified vagrancy as an international issue that nonetheless assumes distinct forms in different foreign states. Indeed, Flynt’s collection attempts to cover all aspects of vagabondage in his text, which is broken up into four distinct sections: his studies of the tramp persona and distribution throughout the land; a description of Flynt’s own travels as one among many tramps across Europe and the US; intimate “sketches” of tramp life; and finally, a dictionary of the tramp’s jargon. The arrangement of his work in this manner already gestures to the significance he places on international comparison as a means for explaining the features of the tramp population.

The bulk of the text is therefore split between his studies of the tramp population and his travel writings—a juxtaposition that evokes the type of international framework in which Flynt’s tramp figure came into being. In recognition of this effort, a prefatory note from Andrew D. White, then US ambassador to Germany, opens Flynt’s book with an explicit acknowledgement of its contributions to

the juridical world. In a letter to the author reprinted in Flynt's volume, White makes the case that the rise of the tramp population in the US reflects back on the federal government's inadequate powers of oversight when it comes to migration and labor. While White sees tramps as pressing problem for the US in particular, he looks to Europe for guidance. "We are allowing a great and powerful criminal class to be developed," White cautions, "while crime is held carefully in check in most European countries." He concludes: "So well is this coming to be known by the criminal classes of Europe that it is perfectly well understood here that they look upon the United States as a 'happy-hunting ground,' and more and more seek it, to the detriment of our country and of all that we hold most dear in it."³² In his role as an observer of European policy, White makes a strident case for using Flynt's ethnographic writings as resource for revising US legal codes regulating this illicit form of migration.

The narrative model that Flynt produces in this case—hinging on the subject of the tramp and overseas travel—facilitates this appropriation by official governing bodies. For Flynt, the representation of the ethnographer's travels abroad to Europe is crucial, insofar as it meditates on the strengths and weaknesses of society by creating an international frame of comparison.³³ While *Tramping with Tramps* appears on its surface to engage little the popular legacy of travel writing—compared to, for example, a more conventional travelogue like Twain's *A Tramp Abroad*—it nonetheless mimics this genre's structure. In pursuit of the American tramp, Flynt moves not only across the United States but also to England, Germany, and Russia. The extensive scope of Flynt's travels is, he assures his readers, a critical aspect to his project of living as a tramp in order to demystify this class for his readers. Flynt's status as a participant observer of vagrancy, in other words, compels him to move both in and outside national borders. "My purpose in seeking out [vagrant persons] was to learn about their life," he explains in the opening pages, "and I soon saw that, to know it well, I must become joined to it and be part and parcel of its various manifestations."³⁴

In addition to codifying the tramp as a social class, Flynt also identifies the larger regulatory system that would control this population. Indeed, Flynt's emphasis on rehabilitation as well as criminalization should immediately call to mind the nineteenth-century expansion of disciplinary and surveillance institutions that increasingly defined the Euro-American nation-state. As Miller and Rose argue, over the course of the twentieth century these states sought the means to bring the citizen into closer relation to the state as an agent for the public good. In other words, the discourse of individualism that these structures had groomed over the course of the nineteenth century is revised in order to introduce the concept of social responsibility. "The individual was to be integrated into society in the form of a citizen with social needs," Miller and Rose explain, "in a contract in which individual and society had mutual claims and obligations."³⁵ On one level, this ideology demands that both individuals and "society" sacrifice some level of autonomy in exchange for improving the collective whole. But on a more nuanced level, this logic also implies that citizens embrace a dual identity as both autonomous individuals and constituent members of

a social demographic. Flynt's treatment of vagrancy in this instance showcases the conflicting categories of citizen on one hand and population on the other, a dynamic Partha Chatterjee locates, drawing from Foucault, in the Western democratic states of the early twentieth century. Flynt's thorough accounting of vagrancy—across international borders—manifests the textual counterpart to the “network of surveillance” that Chatterjee argues collects information “on every aspect of the life” of a given population under the pretense of providing for the well-being of this group.³⁶ Failing to contribute to the social good along these lines therefore entails a failure on the individual's part that warrants a swift and collective response.

According to Flynt, tramps are able to reform and lead conventionally productive lives—if only the state can inculcate in them the “responsibilities” attending civil participation and persuade them “to take advantage of its opportunities.”³⁷ Flynt outlines this objective in the earliest pages of *Tramping with Tramps*. By making the vagrant an object of study, he declares, the juridical system can better develop tactics for incarcerating criminals of all types. His emphasis on correcting the science behind the state's disciplinary apparatus is apparent from the text's earliest pages: “Human justice recoils from severe treatment of the man who, through an outbreaking sinner, bears evidence of being sinned against as well as sinning; and yet, before we can fall in with this view, we must carefully consider the theory on which it is based, and its claims to a scientific foundation” (2). Accordingly, Flynt argues that studying vagrants offer investigators a look at criminals “in their own habitat,” before they have been subject to the deleterious conditions of the penal system (3). As this statement makes expressly clear, Flynt sees his writing as a crucial component of the regulatory state. By delineating an otherwise diffuse population with specific demographic data, he argues, he makes the case that his work does nothing less than revise the “distorted view of the criminal ... in penology” (5).

Specifically, Flynt attributes this distortion to the theories of Cesare Lombroso, the Italian criminologist whose theories of criminal anthropology widely influenced US legal authorities at the time. Lombroso held that criminality is an inherited trait; serious criminals consequently exhibit “atavistic anomalies”—such as oversized ears, a pronounced brow, or enlarged incisors—that physically mark their natural propensity to crime.³⁸ While Lombroso's theories had little currency in Europe, they were highly influential with social scientists in the US, who embraced his views and their underlying notion of biological determinism.³⁹ While Flynt avoids any extended critique of the eugenic underpinnings to this line of reasoning, he nonetheless identifies the shortcomings in its categorization of the criminal classes. Most immediately, this approach fails to identify vagrants as a specific demographic in the first place. Flynt explains: “Lombroso and other investigators classify the cases they have studied as political, instinctive, occasional, habitual and professional; but, so far as my finding is concerned, only one class is of any great importance—the professional.”⁴⁰ Although Lombroso attempts to account for all classes of criminal, Flynt argues, the modern tramp confounds his system. The ineffective classification schema in turn generates

further misinformation regarding vagrancy. Simply put, Lombroso's schema fails to account for what Flynt had actually observed during his time on the road. "Contrary to a more or less popular opinion," he continues, "I must also say that the criminals I am acquainted with are not such because they are unable to keep body and soul together in any other way" (4). Rather, "they are above their environment, and are often gifted with talents which would enable them to do well in any class" (5). As this excerpt makes clear, Flynt's text helps criminalize vagrancy by providing a more accurate depiction of the individual and social characteristics of this group.

The emphasis on accuracy in demographic sorting in this last instance further supports the rehabilitation of the tramp to the extent that it reimagines hyperbolic versions of vagabond criminality as more normalized cases of containment and rehabilitation. To this end, *Tramping with Tramps* identifies the vagrant's potential to work within conventional social structures. Rather than the "scum of their environment," the vagrants Flynt observes are citizens in need of discipline to direct their talents to socially productive outlets. If Flynt avoids a full-on critique of Lombroso's theories, he nonetheless advocates for more thorough demographic data in regards to the tramp population. He makes the practical benefits of this effort especially clear in his discussion of "penal conditions" for reforming "The Children of the Road," the youngest among the vagrants, before they become accustomed to vagabondage. In order to improve the state's regulation of vagrancy, Flynt contends, rehabilitation centers for these youths should be established on the basis of "a humane and scientific separation of the inmates": "Sex, age, height and weight are not the only things to be taken into consideration when dealing with erring children. Birth, temperament, habits, education, and experience are questions of far more vital importance, and it is no unreasonable demand upon the State that careful attention to each of these points be required in the scheme of such institutions" (64). Flynt's ethnography is an attempt to provide the state with these very details—offering not only physical descriptions but sketches of habit and temperament as well—that it needs in order to better rehabilitate the most amenable members of the vagrant class.

Ultimately, the project of documenting all aspects of vagabondage as it appears in the United States moves Flynt outside its borders and into the international sphere in which vagrants circulate. But if Flynt's narrative reenacts the tramp's mobility, it nonetheless evinces an overriding interest in the policies responsible for bringing the tramp into the fold of the state's disciplinary apparatus. From the very beginning of his travels, Flynt characterizes the societies he visits on the basis of their respective approaches to eliminating vagrants through state policy. For both Flynt and Ambassador White, Germany in particular served as point of origin for the welfare state reforms that would become an essential component of Western social democracies in the twentieth century.

Before the unification of the German Empire in 1871, the Prussian state had hoped to offset the worst consequences of the factory economy—as it saw unfolding in England in particular—with a more proactive form of state administration.⁴¹ After

unification, the new nation-state under the direction of Otto von Bismarck further extended a paternalist model of governance to the rest of the empire, which had by this time become a “pioneer in social insurance” within the context of the West.⁴² By 1880, the German state already had a first-of-its-kind compulsory insurance program in place to cover workers who were unable to work due to injury or old age.⁴³ In view of its pioneering role in social welfare reform, the German model is treated by both White and Flynt as a template for expanding the state’s control over working and non-working citizens alike. By making these people accountable to the public, the German welfare reforms provided the kind of administrative logic that, while not eradicating vagrants completely, would make these non-productive individuals subject to monitoring.

Flynt’s emphasis on the effects of German policy on vagrants is especially telling with respect to how his account facilitates better governmental practice. For example, Flynt’s first impressions of Germany immediately foreground the singular figure embodying governance:

William II of Germany is the ruler of about fifty millions of people. A small fraction comprises the nobility, while the great majority are commoners, and the rest, about one hundred thousand, are roving beggars. His Imperial Majesty is probably well acquainted with his nobles, and he thinks that he understands the commoners, but the tramp who passes his castle now and then is a foreigner at home. Yet he is found in every city, town, and village, and there is hardly a home in the empire which he has not visited.⁴⁴

Flynt introduces the idea of government regulation from the very first lines of his account of German society. But even in the face of this relatively expansive state, he still sees the tramp as a problem that must be solved in terms of even greater state supervision. The German system of governance is a point of departure for Flynt, one that proposes a template for state regulation but still calls out for correction. The movement of “roving beggars” poses a nuisance for the state inasmuch as these figures remain inscrutable in the eyes of the law: the wandering vagrant moves relentlessly through city and countryside while the government struggles to envision this portion of its population in the first place. Interested in the “real facts” regarding the lives of these tramps, Flynt finds little help from extant governmental agencies: “I called the Bureau of Statistics, hoping surely to find here carefully tabulated statistics of vagrancy; but I was disappointed” (170). Where contemporary statistics fail, Flynt proposes his own data-gathering project: “I finally decided to give up these fruitless investigations, and to become a tramp myself in order to achieve my ends” (171). Flynt’s ethnography in this instance fills in the gaps in the official record, providing the statistical accounting that even the relatively robust German regulatory state has

failed to provide.

The fact that Flynt's exercise in this instance is divorced from the United States and its specific tramp problem only further demonstrates the relevancy of his ethnography to the state and statecraft rather than the nation. The vagrants he is studying in this case are German, but his method of information-gathering promises to benefit all states invested in tracking their respective vagrant populations. Even as Flynt describes vagrants as "human parasites" throughout his text, he works not to expel this population but to bring it within the fold of the civil sphere (ix). He strives to make the tramp visible (in terms of the demographic data that the state calls for) as a first step toward making that figure accountable. His report of traveling in Germany therefore provides American readers with a clearer sense of what they can appropriate from states with long-standing welfare bureaucracies. Although the German tramp (like German unemployment relief programs) predates any American equivalent, Flynt nonetheless is careful to scrutinize vagrants' habits through a decidedly American lens. From this perspective, he quickly finds faults with the German system he is documenting. As his encounter with the Bureau of Statistics previously indicated, Flynt points to the government's unwillingness to recognize the features of the tramp as the great obstacle to containing vagrancy in a given state.

If authorities in the US are as yet unequipped to track the tramp population, the German state refuses to distinguish vagrants as a social group in the first place. Accordingly, its system for distributing unemployment relief makes no distinction between unemployed laborers and what Flynt sees as the professional tramp, who "prefers begging to working" (171). According to him, the "voluntary vagrant" confounds even an expansive welfare system so long as this form of governance assumes all unemployed citizens are actively seeking conventional forms of paid work (198). In responding, the scale of the state's intervention is less crucial than its tactics and strategies of application. Thus, while Flynt dismisses the German welfare system of taxation and poor relief as "even more inanely generous than its counterpart in the United States" (198), he proposes making the US system more adept at identifying all types of work within a given social system—even in its illicit forms.

Ultimately, European travelling in the guise of the tramp affords Flynt an ideal view to evaluate both foreign forms of governance as well as the potential currency of these legal codes back home. So while *Tramping with Tramps* is in search of governmental policies ready for appropriation, it also recognizes the state-by-state variation within this global network. This comparative aspect to Flynt's text, in which international materials ultimately strengthen local forms of identity, is most apparent in how it allows Flynt to address the American tramp as a national figure. Among the English "moochers," for example, Flynt is made the object of spectacle on the basis of his national affiliation: "They proclaimed our nationality wherever we went. Never in my life have I been so bothered with stares" (234). Up to this point in the text, Flynt had indicated that the "British tramp had long been an object of curiosity" for him, owing in no small part to his cultural proximity to his "American cousin" (229). Once

he moves among these British vagrants, however, he is overcome with a sense of the British tramp's relative shabbiness. Unlike the American tramp, Flynt explains, the "English moocher ... dresses in a way that in America would be thought indecent and in Germany criminal. He is too lazy to clean up, if he had the chance, and harbors vermin as if he liked them" (238). At first glance, the ethnographer's denigration of the English moocher and his privileging of the American tramp appears to salvage a distinctly national identity, something that the rest of the text's emphasis on the internationalism of the tramp otherwise appears to undercut. At the same time, the distinction also makes it clear that Flynt acknowledges the more material consequences of welfare policy on a local level. The allusion to German criminal codes, for instance, deftly connotes the relatively robust social controls that—as Flynt, White, and even Twain describe—distinguish that country's tramps. The comparison of German, American and English tramps therefore showcases shades of difference in relation to the respective social controls in each country and, by implication, the potential for shaping vagrants through more potent laws in the future. Simply put, comparison provides the means for imagining an American species in every register, from cultural stereotypes to the creation of legal statutes.

As part of the intertextual codification of the tramp subject, Flynt uses the language of cultural exchange to evaluate the health of the nation. This case in particular demonstrates the extent to which commentators located the problem of vagrancy within a global nexus in order to broaden the disciplinary power of the state. The international framework in Flynt's vagrant study—as well as in McCook's census and Kelly's antitramp polemic—demonstrates that the reevaluation of the vagrant class in *Tramping with Tramps* represents a renewed push for addressing vagrancy through legislative reform near the beginning of the twentieth century. Balancing local color with his more legalistic concerns, Flynt sets up an international, comparative model that nonetheless operates under the aegis of the state. It is only by first treating the tramp as a global figure that Flynt is able to outline appropriate social controls for vagrants in the US. In doing so, he is clearing a space for the United States—or, more specifically, its governing institutions—among an emerging community of welfare states in the industrialized West. The economic and legal systems that effectively created the category of unemployment are far from unique to the US, Flynt suggests, but by adopting vigorous social controls the state will make the fringe populations generated by the global economy subject to government administration. By linking the tramp's movements to this international framework, Flynt and his contemporaries delineate vagrancy as a neat demographic category. If Twain had yearned for an "experienced tramp" to "reform" in his letter to the *Courant*, Flynt provides a view of what this rehabilitation might entail in *Tramping with Tramps*. The tramping that appears in this book puts the vagrant's mobility to work, insofar as his travels overseas put into relief the international nexus that created the tramp (as a product of global economic instability) and codified vagrancy (as the subject of anti-vagrancy codes).

In Flynt's work in particular, the demographic sorting of an otherwise diffuse and highly mobile population cements the state's ability to monitor even its least conventional demographic groups. As this "tramp scare" period makes clear, the brief legal vacuum that initially enshrouded the tramp left this figure subject to arrest and, unofficially, to mob violence. In this context, Flynt's ethnography bridges popular and official accounts of vagrancy by retooling the moral problem of idleness into a more manageable one of criminal forms of labor. Accordingly, the representation of international travel as the cornerstone to fighting vagrancy removes this group from the brink of vigilantism and places it within the jurisdiction of state authority. From the perspective of the government, to rehabilitate the tramp—to do as Flynt suggests and make the tramp accountable to society—improves the health of the body politic as a whole. In sources as ostensibly different as Flynt and Twain, the tramp evinces latent value to the state; the key component to this project entails enabling the state to account for the tramp not as a problem population but as population per se. Taken together, the representation of tramping in Flynt's writing underscores the indelible link between national debates about public health and good government, as well as the international spectrum in which such a discursive project is formed.

Notes

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¹ Henry George, *Social Problems* (Chicago and New York: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1883), 179.

² Tim Cresswell, "Mobility, Syphilis, and Democracy: Pathologizing the Mobile Body" in *Pathologies of Travel*, ed. Richard Wrigley and George Revill (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 262.

³ Tim Cresswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion, 2001), 48.

⁴ Michael A. Bellesiles, *1877: America's Year of Living Violently* (New York: New Press, 2010), 1.

⁵ Steven P. Reti, *Silver and Gold: The Political Economy of International Monetary Conferences, 1867–1892* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1998), 62.

⁶ Among recent studies of vagrancy, historians DePastino, Cresswell, and Bellesiles all use the term "tramp scare" to denote the moral panic near the end of the nineteenth century that, while hinging on the stereotype of the tramp, reflected a greater anxiety about industrialism. See Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Cresswell, "Mobility, Syphilis, and Democracy" and *The Tramp in America*; Bellesiles, *1877*.

⁷ Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 8.

⁸ Cresswell, *The Tramp in America*, 9.

⁹ Bellesiles, 1877, 117.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David Macy, ed. Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003), 61.

¹¹ Bellesiles, 1877, 113.

¹² DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 49.

¹³ Josiah Flynt, *Tramping with Tramps: Studies and Sketches of Vagabond Life* (1899; repr. Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1972), 5.

¹⁴ Flynt elsewhere refers to Twain's *A Tramp Abroad* as a key text in his own tramping expedition across Europe, which formed the basis for the writings included in *Tramping with Tramps*. See Flynt's reference to Twain in *My Life* (New York: The Outing Pub. Co., 1908), 203–204. Although these references can be taken to show some level of influence on Flynt's ethnographic writings, I am more interested in how both authors draw from a shared discourse revolving around vagrancy and international comparison.

¹⁵ SLC to the Editor of the *Hartford Courant*, Munich, 2 February 1879, in *Mark Twain's Letters, 1876–80*, Mark Twain Project Online, accessed 19 February 2015, <http://www.marktwainproject.org>.

¹⁶ To be sure, the absence of literal vagrants from the surface of *A Tramp Abroad*—in contrast with, for example, *Roughing It* and *Huckleberry Finn*—may indicate to some that Twain is uninterested in this instance in actual tramps at all. But if recent readers have removed this text from the historical debate surrounding vagrancy, the earliest readers of the book would have readily made the connection between *A Tramp Abroad* and more archetypal versions of vagabondage. Indeed, the cover to the first edition of the travelogue prominently featured an image of a stock tramp character.

¹⁷ Twain's reference to tramps residing in eighteenth-century Bavaria is something of an anachronism given that the specific version of vagrancy denoted by the term “tramp” emerged a century later. Nonetheless, the social controls Twain references in Germany are in his telling responsible for the absence of modern tramps at the time of his writing.

¹⁸ SLC to the Editor of the *Hartford Courant*.

¹⁹ Cresswell, *The Tramp in America*, 50.

²⁰ Vagrancy Act, 1824, 5 Geo. 4, c. 83.

²¹ Qtd. in Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down & Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53.

²² Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 53.

²³ Portions of this article derive from my dissertation manuscript, which identifies this transformation of vagrancy in both the US and UK and analyzes its impact on the discourse of public policy around the turn of the twentieth century.

²⁴ William Dwight Porter Bliss, *The Encyclopedia of Social Reform; Including Political Economy, Political Science, Sociology and Statistics* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1897), 1345.

²⁵ John James McCook, "A Tramp Census and Its Revelations," *The Forum* (1893): 766.

²⁶ Edmond Kelly, *The Elimination of the Tramp by the Introduction into America of the Labour Colony System Already Proved Effective in Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 4–5.

²⁷ Kelly, *The Elimination of the Tramp*, 3.

²⁸ Cresswell, *The Tramp in America*, 17.

²⁹ Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 100.

³⁰ Peter Miller and Nikolas S. Rose, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 5.

³¹ DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 49.

³² Flynt, *Tramping*, vii.

³³ Larzer Ziff offers a definitive take on this in *Return Passages*, in which he argues that the genre of travel writing sets out to measure one's "national traditions ... against the manner in which other societies met the problems of living the daily life." *Return Passages: Great American Travel Writing, 1780–1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 7.

³⁴ Flynt, *Tramping*, 3.

³⁵ Miller and Rose, *Governing the Present*, 48.

³⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 11.

³⁷ Flynt, *Tramping*, 5.

³⁸ Peter Cordella and Larry J. Siegel, *Readings in Contemporary Criminological Theory* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 7.

³⁹ Larry J. Siegel, "Cesare Lombroso," in *Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies*, 11th ed., ed. Larry J. Siegel (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013), 141–42.

⁴⁰ Flynt, *Tramping*, 3.

- ⁴¹ Hermann Beck, *The Origins of the Authoritarian Welfare State in Prussia: Conservatives, Bureaucracy, and the Social Question, 1815–70* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 55.
- ⁴² Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990), 22.
- ⁴³ E. P. Hennock, *The Origin of the Welfare State in England and Germany, 1850–1914: Social Policies Compared* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91.
- ⁴⁴ Flynt, *Tramping*, 169.

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