Reading Guide: Fraser, Ch 9 “Fable of Acquiescence: The Businessman as Populist Hero”

In his book, The Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of American Resistance to Organized Wealth and Power, Fraser makes the claim that Americans today no longer collectively resist organized wealth and power. He argues in the first part of the book that there was a time, a time similar to ours, when Americans resisted organized wealth and power. This time was called the First Gilded Age. Before our break, we examined the first Gilded Age, the time of the industrialization of America, the rise of the robber barons, and the incredible inequality and poverty, but we also examined the resistance. This is what I call, and most labor historians, call the Second Civil War.

The second part of the book, examines the Second Gilded Age, our time, and explores the structures and forces that have made us acquiescent. We are labor without class consciousness, we are citizens who have no concept of democracy and neither challenge nor even recognize the need to challenge a plutocratic system of governance, and we are human beings who believe freedom is consumerism. (See Chapter 10 Fables of Freedom: Brand X). The subject of Chapter is the myth of the businessmen (aka “new plutocrat”) as freedom fighter and Fraser in the chapter that the myth has been a significant factor in creating “the mood of acquiescence in our time.”

As you read the chapter keep the following in mind:

1. How does Fraser say the people viewed the Robber Barons during the First Gilded Age?

2. According to Fraser, the “new plutocrat” has become a hero of the people in today’s America because they have been able to do what?

3. What are examples of the role that popular culture and ideological institutions have played in creating the “new plutocrat” as democratic hero?

4. The populist hero has been successful in convincing Americans in a new concept of freedom. What is it? How is the government characterized in this new idea of freedom?

5. Fraser argues that an important transformation of the corporation is one of the reasons our time is one of acquiescence. What is it?

6. As the new plutocrats gets richer and richer, how do they convince the people that they are not a neo-Feudal upper class?