Introduction

On 1 December 1930, at the start of the Great Depression, W. K. Kellogg acted on the advice of company president Lewis J. Brown and replaced the traditional three daily eight-hour shifts in his cereal plant with four six-hour shifts. By adding one entire shift, he and his managers hoped to create jobs for laid-off employees and for some of the unemployed in Battle Creek.

The six-hour day was an instant success, attracting the attention of the national media and Herbert Hoover's administration. It was one of the biggest stories ever to come out of Battle Creek, already famous for its Sanitarium and cereals. The initiative won strong support from prominent businessmen and labor leaders all over the country and from community leaders and workers in Battle Creek. Observers throughout the world speculated that Kellogg's experiment offered a practical way out of the depression and, in light of the steady decline in hours of labor for over a century, a foretaste of things to come.

The first day of operations was relatively quiet. A heavy snowstorm delayed street cars, but time-clocks were reset to record everyone as on-time for the first six-hour shift. Personnel director N. D. Huff calmly reported that the new operations "are O.K.," and even though "many new people" had been hired to work the fourth shift, "it appears that if any readjustments are needed, they will be few and of a minor nature."[1] In the months that followed, local papers quoted George Bernard Shaw's and Julian Huxley's predictions of a two-hour work day, at most, by the end of the century, and cited education officials in Washington who were urging the local schools to "face facts" and concentrate on "education for the worthy use of leisure." Taking note of the widespread interest in shorter hours, H. G. Wells began to dramatize work's decline in *Things to Come* and *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, which would become his most popular movies. Kellogg's, it seemed to many, was blazing a trail to a future where free time would replace work as life's central concern.

Through the depression years, the six-hour day functioned as Kellogg (known to all as "W. K.") and Brown hoped. Jobs were created as the

company payroll grew, and plant employees seemed delighted to have more time of their own, especially since their weekly paychecks were only a little smaller—hourly wages were raised 12.5 percent that December and another 12.5 percent a year later. Moreover, when Kellogg's was organized in 1937 by the National Council of Grain Producers, one of the local union's first demands was that the six-hour day become "standard," and that the few eight-hour workers (such as night watchmen) be permitted to switch to six hours if they wanted to. This demand and the fact that two-thirds of the workers on the longer shifts then voted to switch are strong indications of worker support during the 1930s.

But the "standard" six-hour day and other union demands soured Kellogg management on the short shift. After W. K. turned over company management to a new team headed by the Chicago banker W. H. Vanderploeg, his and Brown's original vision faded, and the company began to discourage shorter hours. Complying with Franklin Roosevelt's executive order mandating a longer work week as a wartime measure, the Kellogg plant went to three eight-hour shifts in the early days of World War II. But, prompted by the union, management reluctantly promised to return to six-hour shifts as soon as the war ended.

After the war, management persistently tried to persuade workers to continue the eight-hour shift offering generous money incentives and using the issue as a bargaining chip in contract negotiations. The company's wartime promise notwithstanding, the local union had to struggle to regain the six-hour day, voting three to one in 1945 and again in 1946 to return to the short shift. Even after returning to six-hours, the company kept up the pressure, insisting that "those who want it" be allowed to vote to work longer. Workers were divided by this tactic, and, through the next four decades, department after department voted to return to eight-hours.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, Kellogg's six-hour workers were increasingly isolated in a town and a nation of eight-hour workers. As fellow employees deserted the cause, they were forced to defend their salient position in labor's historic fight for shorter hours, which became increasingly exposed. Still, they held on to six-hours for over forty years in the face of intense management, community, and even union pressure. As their numbers thinned, they retreated to six-hour enclaves in a handful of the plant's departments. Eventually even these hotbeds of shorter-hour sentiment were unable to hold out. The remaining 530 workers, over three-quarters of whom were women, surrendered in February 1985.

Unlike its birth, the passing of the six-hour day was obscure. Only the *Battle Creek Enquirer* carried the story. The assistant city editor wrote in the "Local Interest" section: "Kellogg Co.'s six-hour shifts were laid to rest at Stan's Place Friday with tears and laughter, Bloody Mary's and sloppy joes. A black cardboard coffin sat on the table in the Springfield tavern inscribed with the epitaph: 'Good Time 6 Hrs. Born April 1, 1931 [*sic*]. Died, Feb. 8, 1985. RIP."[2] The *Enquirer* also published a eulogy that one woman wrote for the occasion.

FAREWELL GOOD FRIEND—"OLD SIX HRS.":
We had become so attached to you.
'Tis sad but true!
You kept our families closer together.
But Mr. 8 hrs. said, "Go out and get 'em!"
He had the "win".
But we didn't "grin".
Now you're gone and we're all so blue . . .
Since you've taken some of our friends, too!
Loyal friends who'd rather "quit" than be without "you".
So off you'll go to lie beside our founder—"Mr. K".
Our bodies will never forget "you".
For you were good to them, too!
And now a moment of silence—let's shed those tears.
We'll try hard to banish our fears.
And now get out the *vitamins*—give your doctor a call
Cause old 8 hrs. has got us "all".
Sorrowfully written by Ina Sides.[3]

This simple narrative continues to be retold in many ways in Battle Creek. In this book several voices tell the story or parts of it: this writer, trying to understand the history of working hours in the United States; various Kellogg managers interested in motivating employees and producing cereal efficiently; and the people who actually worked the six-hour shift over the years.

THE RISE AND FALL OF FREE TIME

A journalist might tell the story of Kellogg's six-hour day in the simple and direct terms used above. Seen from the historian's point of view, that story is part of a remarkable twentieth-century epic. Kellogg's experi-

ment exemplifies major trends in the history of labor in the United States and illustrates several changes in workers' perceptions about, and public attitudes toward, work and leisure since the Great Depression.

In 1976 the economist John Owen sparked a lively scholarly debate with his observation that "employed Americans have had no net gain in their leisure . . . since the end of World War II." Historians and economists have struggled to explain why since then.[4] In my book *Work Without End*, I suggested that during the 1920s American business, reacting to the "threat of leisure"—the constant erosion of working hours that had cut working time in half over the "century of shorter hours"—discovered the "New Economic Gospel of Consumption." Instead of accepting work's continuing decline and imminent fall from its dominant social position, businessmen, economists, advertisers, and politicians preached that there would never be "enough" because the entrepreneur and industry could invent new things for advertising to sell and for people to want and work for indefinitely. Thereupon, in direct response to the spectre of work's fall to leisure, modern consumerism was born and a new kind of "necessity"—indeterminate and changing, but still somehow undiluted—came into being.

But the Gospel of Consumption soon faced a crisis, the Great Depression. On its own, without government support, infinite industrial and economic growth was a fantasy. Giving up on the absurd idea that people would keep working to buy anything and everything they could afford or borrow for, businessmen and conservative politicians tried to redistribute the work that was still left by the Machine to meet the crisis—a political course of action they called at the time "work sharing." Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, in a stroke of political genius, came up with an alternative solution to unemployment: government-supported *work creation*. Enlisting the forces of the federal government, he used deficits, liberal Treasury policies, expanded government works projects, and enlarged government payrolls to "stimulate the economy," create more work for more people, and revive the Gospel of Consumption.

Business in the 1920s and Roosevelt in 1935 responded directly to the decline of work, inspired by a vision of perpetual growth in the economy permitting an indefinite expansion of work hours. In the New Deal plan, however, "full-time" work and economic growth would be guaranteed by government support and not left to the "free market." The most important political watershed of this century was crossed, and "JOBS, JOBS,

JOBS" became the domestic touchstone for subsequent politicians from both the Left and the Right. The goal of shorter hours was abandoned. "Work without end," based on consumerism, prevailed.

More recently, in her widely publicized book *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure,* the economist Juliet Schor compounded the historical puzzle, arguing persuasively that leisure has actually declined since 1976. Bill Clinton adapted her argument to the 1992 presidential campaign with the slogan "Americans are working harder for less" than when Ronald Reagan was elected. Finding that the "average Joe" is working a full month more today, Schor concluded that the historical process of work reduction has not only halted; it has reversed. As I did in *Work Without End,* she attempts to explain this phenomenon through the rise of consumerism, the structure of capitalism, and labor's changing positions.

Subsequently, overwork has become a hot topic in television specials, popular books, and countless magazine and newspaper articles. The public and journalists in the popular media have joined academics in asking why people in the most technologically advanced nations in the world are starved for time. The general public seems to have recognized as obvious what scholars have struggled to disclose—that instead of the abundant leisure once promised by the Machine, time for life outside work is vanishing, and families, communities, and personal life have suffered as a direct result. Yet no one has seriously asked what workers themselves thought about leisure and work after winning the forty-hour week, or explored the reasons they give for abandoning shorter hours.[5]

Kellogg's six-hour day provides a rare opportunity to tell the story of the end of shorter hours from the workers' point of view. Kellogg workers advanced beyond the vast majority of workers on the shorter-hours front and, in the face of intense pressure, held their position and their extra two hours for fifty-five years. Why the majority initially supported six hours, why some held their ground for over half a century, and why they finally gave up are exactly the questions historians need to ask of workers in general.

Such a history might begin to discredit suggestions that workers have been helpless in the face of "economic necessity" by demonstrating that up until 1984 a group of workers, supported (in Herbert Gutman's words) by a strong "subculture . . . with deep roots in tradition," fought for shorter hours and questioned the primacy of work in their lives, just

as generations of workers had done before them, continuing in the face of evolving "necessity" to find meaning and value in the time "outside" their industrial jobs.[6] Instead of helpless vessels carried along by the tides of the Economy or driven by a "natural" urge to work and consume, the Kellogg women and men better resemble the historical characters Gutman and E. P. Thompson described: "working people [who] were not simply overridden or manipulated . . . but, on the contrary . . . left their own clear marks on the nation's social and political evolution." Focusing on what Gutman called the "modes of thought and perception through which [the worker] confronted the industrialization process," the historian who pays close attention to what Kellogg workers did and said may discern the way they experienced the end of shorter hours.[7]

Following Lynn Hunt, William H. Sewell, and Gareth Stedman Jones, as well as Thompson and Gutman, I maintain that in Battle Creek the "necessity" to work "full-time" was a culturally produced outcome of class and gender struggles—the symbolic product of a forty-year-long discourse, echoes of which may be still heard in that city. In short, I argue that cultural change rather than "economic forces" or psychological "realities" best explains the end of shorter hours in Battle Creek.[8]

This analysis provides a cultural explanation for the end of shorter hours, going beyond the social and political explanations I offered in *Work Without End*. The Kellogg experiment demonstrates that changes in the language and the cultures of managers and workers in Battle Creek provide important clues to explain leisure's decline in recent years.

GENDER, CLASS, AND CULTURE: SUBVERSIVE LEISURE

Battle Creek and the community of Kellogg workers and managers there are ideal subjects for the historian. Superb records preserving workers' language and stories originate there. In 1932 agents from the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor interviewed nearly all of the women who worked at Kellogg's about the six-hour day and other family and community matters related to their "extra time." All 434 reports are available in the National Archives. Hundreds of workers, managers, and union officials remember the six-hour day, and dozens have wonderful stories that they seem eager to tell. Many who worked six-hour days during the Great Depression can help reconstruct the old stories, phrases, and words that grew up around Kellogg's original experiment.

In the pages that follow, I analyze the themes and metaphors found in the accounts collected in 1932. I also pay close attention to popular family and community activities (such as canning, gardening, child-rearing practices, visiting, sports, family projects and outings) and community settings (such as softball fields, parks, front porches, and gardens), which gave symbolic structure to activities outside work.[9]

I use my own interviews and letters from living Kellogg workers and managers to show how the community discourse evolved from the 1932 baseline. Since 1988 I have received more than three hundred letters from Kellogg workers and managers who responded to my inquiries, and together with my students, and with some help from public television station KCTS in Seattle, Washington, I have conducted over a hundred interviews with Kellogg workers, managers, union officials, community leaders, librarians, newspaper reporters, and others. Comparing the "texts" of 1932 and 1988 reveals the dynamics of the debate about the six-hour day.[10]

It was no accident that women were the strongest and most persistent of the six-hour supporters, continuing to criticize the concept of work as the center of life and promoting alternative social structures, activities, and values outside the job in their "extra time." After most of the men had deserted the cause, the women continued labor's 150-year tradition, questioning the role of work discipline in their lives, looking more and more to the family, school, and community for meaning and satisfaction, and discovering new kinds of power and status in their time outside industrial capitalism and the marketplace.

As people worked less, work and the marketplace lost some of their importance. For many workers the two "extra hours" were enough to tip the balance between work and leisure. As work began to lose its place as the dominant social and cultural focus, the traditional patterns of status and control that had been established on the centrality of work were unsettled. Male dominance, for example, was assured in a culture dominated by work; it was much less secure outside the job. Males, threatened, retreated to the job and fortified its importance with new language and stories.

Class as well as gender helped determine the roles the historical actors played in the rhetorical drama. After World War II, Kellogg managers and senior male workers, with status and power at stake, propagandized work, trivialized leisure, and feminized shorter hours. A coalition was

born as managers who recognized the "threat of leisure" and male employees united against the "other": the young, the sissies, the "misfits," and the "girls" who "didn't even know enough" to realize the importance of a "full-time job."

Typically, academic discussions of power, control, and conflict focus on money, ownership of property, job status, or political power. But historians and anthropologists have made the case that control in civil society also has to do with time: the daily, seasonal, and generational comings and goings, occasions, rituals, and celebrations in the community. Schedule appears to be a fundamental source of cultural authority. In fact, one might argue that time is to civil society what money is to the economic sphere and laws or votes are to the political realm—the medium of exchange, the symbol of value, and the way to get things done.[11]

Certainly, control of time was a point of contention during Kellogg's six-hour experiment, occasionally overshadowing political and economic struggles in the community. Who determined the daily schedule during the two extra hours, what activities were to be done and where, and the structure of the group doing the activity were critical and controversial issues. Men and women, workers and managers, waged a fifty-year struggle for control in Battle Creek on the most fundamental of social levels, forming alliances and contending for the extra time until the mid-1980s, when the issue was settled in favor of "full-time work." Within that narrow, two-hour opening, existing social forms became somewhat fluid; housework and child rearing, work and leisure, "recreation" and sports were rendered problematic. Kellogg workers were able to stand briefly outside the static social order and objectify established gender roles, customs, and duties. New possibilities were tried out, new structures of authority and control, role, identity, duty, and even mutuality and giving emerged from that interstice, only to fade with the disappearance of shorter hours.[12]

"AN INDEPENDENT DOMAIN OF CREATIVE ACTIVITY"

The promise or threat that the extra time would destabilize existing social structures and alter cultural roles was compounded by the possibility that perpetual disorder would be leisure's legacy. A spectre of unstructured time haunted Battle Creek for fifty years.

The resulting discourse about the meaning of the extra hours may be distinguished from the debates about what to do with the time. One of the most important parts of the discourse concerned the value of the two extra hours—whether they were worth keeping. The response ranged from complete rejection to enthusiastic support. Eventually, for many in the community, the two hours became a freedom "too far"—what Robert MacIver, writing about modern leisure, once called "the great emptiness." For such people the extra leisure seemed to lead to radical individualism and permanently unstructured behavior that by definition were bad—"idle hands" and the "devil's workshop" led vigorous metaphorical lives in the city. Abundant leisure seemed to be permanently outside meaning; on its face it was silly and aimless, leading to confusion and despair.[13]

For those who shared these fears, work was the obvious answer. In addition to preserving traditional class and gender roles, the job seemed to many to be the only social structure capable of providing the seriousness and purpose necessary to sustain individual sanity and family and community order. The threat of empty freedom and desolate time excited fundamental fears—fears that with gender struggles and job-status anxieties gave rise to a new rhetoric about "the necessity" of "full-time" work and the "silliness" of leisure. These idioms, becoming dominant, were finally responsible for the death of the six-hour day.

But for an important few mavericks, resembling Jacques Rancière's worker-poets, the extra time remained through the 1980s as a longed-for oasis, a time outside struggle and conflict, class, gender, and control, necessity and structure—beyond what Eugen Fink called the "architectonically . . . complex ordering of purposes" in which "all human work takes place." Beyond what Joseph Pieper called the modern "world of total work" and "universal utilitarianism that seeks to turn everything in the world to some useful purpose," the six-hour deviants found, in Victor Turner's words, "an independent domain of creative activity."[14]

One staunch six-hour worker, Joy Blanchard, saw new possibilities opening for her and for those around her in the two hours. Her job was important for economic reasons, to be sure—she and her husband were a "Kellogg couple," both working six-hours for years. But the extra leisure allowed them to experiment with "the way things were usually done." She was proud that her husband took an unusually active role in their children's upbringing and that he was the only male "grade parent" at their sons' grammar school.

Blanchard consistently talked about her own job as a means to other, better things, repeating that "work was never the center of my life" or "the most important thing." The two extra hours gave her a measure of time outside the job and housework, outside expectations and duty, conflict and control, for "other things" she claimed as her own. Certainly, housework took much of her time, as did "family business," discipline, and problem solving. But, as she phrased it, in the free time she managed to claim for herself she "was able to" read and do "fun, creative things" with her children. Such "free" activities were her reward, the goal of the day that gave meaning and purpose to her job and housework.

Blanchard eloquently described a respite at the end of household demands, jobs, established social roles, and financial concerns, a margin of time outside for walking, reading, gardening, learning, mothering, teaching, writing, appreciating, loving, thinking, playing, being a neighbor, caring for, talking, birding, for their "own sakes." Such "leisure" was not for resting in order to do more work; it was certainly not for passive "amusement" or mindless consumption. On the contrary, it was the most important part of the day, during which she believed she had found and crafted the best parts of her life, family, community, and citizenship.[15] Blanchard's experience was consistent with Victor Turner's conception of modern leisure as "potentially capable of releasing creative powers, individual and communal, either to criticize or prop up dominant social-structural values. It is . . . possible to conceive of leisure as betwixt-and-between, neither this nor that domain between two lodgments in the work domain, or between occupational and familial and civic [arenas]."[16] Those who embraced the new leisure as a "domain between two lodgments" continued to struggle toward meaning outside industrial work, consumption, and gender role, attempting to find something better to do beyond the "necessities" imposed by the job, housework, and the Economy. But they contended in a losing contest with those who, for a variety of reasons, denied such freedom, embraced "necessity" and stable social roles, and worked harder than ever.

THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNITY

The six-hour mavericks tell their stories about the death of the six-hour day as part of another, larger story about the flow of time, energy, and attention from the home and community to work and consumption. Joy

Blanchard took a stand against television, for example, urging those around her to continue to use at least some of the extra time in active exchange with others, in traditional community-service and family projects. In her opinion, one reason the Kellogg workers went back to work "full-time" was that people in her city had emptied leisure of activity, failing to meet the challenge represented by the extra time. Most had even surrendered activities as fundamental as conversation to "Hollywood, TV, and radio types like Johnny Carson." Having "found nothing better to do" than watch television, shop, or gossip, "they might just as well go back to work."

For Blanchard and other six-hour mavericks, expanding leisure could have fortified the community, strengthened families, preserved tradition, and opened up new cultural opportunities. Overmatched and overpowered, they still aspired to lead their families and community to challenge the mass, popular culture that steadily eroded the local subculture and discourse. From the beginning of the six-hour experiment, outside cultural forces made deep inroads into the local discourse. An important part of the Battle Creek story is the increasing influence of commercial, media culture on leisure time. The expanding mass media competed powerfully with local forms of making, transmitting, and exchanging culture, such as the local production of language, story, entertainment, and interpretation of personal experience. Gradually, active culture-making and practice were transformed into commodities and hawked by "out-of-town" professionals and experts. Local culture-producing leisure activities, along with the extra two hours, were steadily devalued.[17]

Advertisers and professionals, ranging from sports figures to academicians, promised, for a price, to produce culture and leisure without the "bother." The six-hour women heard mass media and "professionals" asking their husbands and neighbors implicitly, Why take the time to go to see ("support") the women playing softball down at the plant when you can listen to the radio or watch the Detroit Tigers on TV? Why "bother" canning when you can buy anything you want at the supermarket? Why struggle to understand the world around you on your own and "make a fool of yourself" expressing opinions on local issues? Why make music, tell stories, paint, write, or observe nature when local "professionals" and experts at Ann Arbor and East Lansing are paid, and paid well, to understand and do such things, and do them so much better than you? After all, since you are not paid for it, why "go to all the trouble?"

Leisure as "the *freedom* to enter, even for some to help generate, the symbolic worlds" became a "bother" and "too much trouble," and was gradually replaced by passive amusement and empty free time. The value of time spent doing and making local culture and crafting homemade discourse, morals, and meaning was steadily discounted.[18] Instead of being the most active and important part of the day or "night of the proletarian" in which to escape capitalist controls, class, gender, and social role, an opportunity to speak, write, do, and make culture, leisure was identified with the lack of effort, commercialized, feminized, trivialized, and co-opted. Only a few continued to see the importance of active leisure in the local production of culture. Only a few recognized the threat that passive, commercial recreation represented to the essence of family and community. As one of the mavericks put it, "nobody was left to argue with."

The century-old view of work as a means to more important activities, the perennial dream of more time off work for "better things," gave way to new words and stories presenting "full-time work" as inevitable and abundant, increasing leisure as "unrealistic," "silly," only for "girls" or "sissies." Gradually, these ways of speaking ossified because of the lack of continuing discourse. Leisure as a realistic alternative to industrial work, an opening to social experimentation, and a challenge to mass amusement and passive cultural consumption waned as mass culture encroached on and then dominated the time spent outside the job. The traditional working-class remedy for the ills of industrialization, the "progressive reduction of the hours of labor," has been nearly lost to the language. Now the dominion of work stands virtually unchallenged and seemingly impregnable. The job resembles a secular religion, promising personal identity, salvation, purpose and direction, community, and a way for those who believe truly and simply in "hard work" to make sense out of the confusion of life. The few who still doubt that work is life's center are condemned as heretics, and time outside work and consumption, without "entertainment" and technology's toys, is a new wilderness.