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## **The Long Journey of Joshua Louis Hicks: A Voice from the Texas Working Class**

BY KYLE WILKISON

Joshua Louis Hicks (1857-1921) worked hard all of his life. He spent over half of his working life investing hard labor and reaping the sparse rewards of a late nineteenth-century American farm laborer and farmer, the condition made worse by being in the South, most especially East Texas. He occupied his last two decades as a print shop worker and typesetter. The day he died, he was a dues-paid-up-card-carrying member of the Waco Typographical Union, No. 188, a local within the International Typographical Union.

As a 23-year-old farmer, Hicks found his voice in 1880, writing columns, editorials, and letters published in local and regional newspapers, usually in defense of Prohibition. The rate of these contributions increased as his interests shifted to the Farmers Alliance, Populist and Socialist parties and his writings appeared in the pages of the organs of those movements. At various times he wrote regular editorials and features for the *Dallas Laborer*, the *Dallas Craftsman*, the *West Texas Sentinel*, the *Farmers' Journal*, the *Dallas Pitchfork* and the *Texarkana Socialist*.

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He contributed reports, poems, features, and letters to the *Christian Advocate*, the *Advocate-Advance*, *Hopkins County Echo*, the *Abilene Reporter*, the *Dallas News*, the *Waco Times Herald*, the *Waco Tribune*, the *Union Advance* and the *Sulphur Springs Gazette*, and others.

His writings reveal the passion of an idealist, often at odds with the cruel vagaries of the world and his own culture. They also reveal the questing mind of a voracious reader. Hick's willingness to question all sorts of authority supplied a tempering skepticism that led him to re-examine beliefs throughout his life and adjust his conclusions over time. Hicks began his writing life as a zealous Prohibitionist and primitive Christian. Near the end, he had abandoned both Prohibition (ironically just as it was winning the day) and formal religion. Yet, some things did not change over his forty-year odyssey (1880-1921) of public writings: Hicks hated violence and war, denounced white supremacy, supported female suffrage, and eventually, longed for a Socialist commonwealth.<sup>1</sup>

Some might suggest that a white East Texas farmer and working man who believed these things must have been an outlier, even one-of-a-kind. While obviously fascinating to historians, is he not otherwise insignificant in understanding the mainstream history of this place? Why should we care about Hicks and his unusual worldview?

As Lawrence Goodwyn, James R. Green and Chandler Davidson have shown, agrarian radicals like Hicks formed a substantial minority in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Southwest. But, in our stronger-than-history cultural memory, such people have been categorically erased and replaced by cowboys, oilmen, entrepreneurs and other iconic myths more serviceable to contemporary elites. Consequently, we think we know more about the poor majority, the American and Texas and East Texas working class, than we really do. Such people appear as stock villains in our popular culture from the facile stereotyping of the entertainment industry to the uninformed generalizations of pundits and even scholars. Indeed, they remain

the butt of the last safely expressed public bigotry in mainstream American culture. Writing a 2016 election-year piece in the *National Review*, political pundit Kevin D. Williamson explained the poverty of the twenty-first century American working class (including those in his native Texas), with the same contemptuous language used by Hicks's opponents a century earlier. In spite of the fact that "nothing happened to them," Williamson writes, he finds them filled with "an incomprehensible malice." Far from being victims of "the Man," the working class is poor because it is dysfunctional, dependent, and engages in the "whelping of human children with all the respect and wisdom of a stray dog." Such characterizations could have come from the press of Gilded Age Texas seeking to explain the rise of rural poverty during the agricultural crises of the 1880s and 1890s. Indeed, as Nancy Isenberg's important 2016 work *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* shows, the roots of such contempt for the poor majority run even further back into American history. In all times and places in the American past, spokespersons for the elite have explained disparities of wealth as the natural result of the distribution of virtue within a population using the reigning normative language of the age: religion, science, economic ideology, or, more recently, a sort of pop-ethnography that finds a "culture in crisis." In every era, the economic winners have confidently explained that the working poor majority ("hillbillies," "white trash," "rednecks," "black rednecks," "losers" or worse) embodied backward traits that kept them poor.<sup>2</sup>

What follows is the brief story of a poor man, a small farmer and hourly wage hand in newspaper print shops. Nevertheless, within this small story lie big contradictions of the malicious cultural portraits we have come to accept for the poor and working class.

Joshua Louis Hicks was born in 1857 the oldest of four children in southwestern Alabama on a small family farm in a county of small semi-subsistence farms. When Hicks was six-

years-old his father died leaving Hick's mother Nancy to provide for the young family. A family friend described Nancy Hicks as "full of humility and love" and "free of prejudice or bigotry." She must have been a hard worker, too. Somehow, his mother kept the family intact and on the farm, probably with the help of kin, for another decade. Hicks described it as a hard childhood but wrote glowingly of his mother. His mother was a member of a religious minority--a Primitive Baptist--in a county noted for another religious minority--a small colony of Quakers--and it is tantalizing to note that this woman's youngest son was named William Penn Hicks. According to the census records, in 1860 they had been among the respectable poor majority with \$700 worth of land and no slaves. By the following decade, this fatherless family's fortunes had dropped by over half and they were looking to get out of Alabama. At age 18, Joshua struck out for Texas working as a plow hand and cotton picker in Brazos County.<sup>3</sup>

By 1880, the widow Nancy Hicks along with her three grown sons and married daughter lived together on a homeplace in Hopkins County, Texas. Hopkins County lies in the beautiful Post Oak strip with its magnificent hardwood trees, sun-dappled meadows and cheap sandy soil. Such soil would produce all the subsistence a family could want as long as they never needed money. Taxes, mortgages, doctors and the like demanded cash but small farmers could pay with the proceeds from the money crop of cotton, which would indeed grow there but sparsely and under protest. The Hicks family lived in the euphoniously named community of Forest Academy, about ten miles from the county seat of Sulphur Springs. It was instructive that the census-taker labeled Nancy Hicks and her three adult sons as illiterates in the 1880 census. Within a few months of the census-taker's visit, the supposedly illiterate Joshua Hicks made his debut in the pages of the East Texas press as a gifted writer and his two younger brothers would exhibit similar levels of literary competence. How did the census-taker arrive at his assessment of the Hicks

boys' literacy? Might he have been estimating the value of their farm, their economic status, their class, instead?<sup>4</sup>

Joshua Hicks turned 23-years-old the year of the census. He had put in his time as a farmhand to get his family to Texas and bought land and he was living in a growing community that included young women. His thoughts turned to love. By that I mean the sappy, gob-smacked, doggerel-writing variety addressed to 19-year-old Henrietta Elizabeth Harrison, "the girl I love so dear," with whom he would spend the next fifty years: "In dream of night I oft-times view those lovely smiles so sweet; then when I wake my all I'd give to see those rosy cheeks."<sup>5</sup>

His writing improved with time. In any case, apparently Henrietta liked this poem as well as his carefully handwritten marriage proposal. They married when she was twenty-one and together they had eight children.<sup>6</sup>

During the decade he spent farming at Forest Academy, Hicks began writing contributions to the newspaper in the county seat of Sulphur Springs with reports on the doings of the farm folk of his community. He subscribed to, or, at least read, a variety of local newspapers as well as national papers promoting Prohibition and agrarian reform.

Along the way, he became a zealous partisan of Prohibition and occasional defender of the agrarian ideal. His range of contributions widened to include pieces in the regional Prohibition and Granger newspapers he read. He stuck mainly to prose with occasional returns to what he called poetry. With each passing piece, his writing achieved greater ease and confidence revealing an earnest and occasionally eloquent voice. This period is also when he first challenged conventional stereotypes. During his zealous defense of the Prohibition Party, he regularly denounced the hold that Civil War memory and resentment played in maintaining Southern white voters' loyalty to the Democratic Party.

In 1882, Hicks turned out what was, perhaps, his best poem and was rewarded by seeing it appear in the Mississippi state

Granger newspaper. It read, in part:

*How strange! When farmers every hour  
 Feel the death-grip of corp'rate power  
 They do not rally to the Grange---  
 Their only hope. Is this not strange?  
 How strange! That Congressmen should pass  
 Bills in behalf of every class  
 Except farmers; to them they cry,  
 "You need no help." (Root, hog, or die.)  
 How strange! That some who advocate  
 Religion in the Lone Star State  
 Should be so deaf to human cries  
 As to publish the railroads' lies.<sup>7</sup>*

What followed this in the 1880s was a long string of essays defending, promoting and preaching the Prohibition Party line. It is within the reams of that dry discourse that Hicks wrote something brave and unexpected. He took on Texas' leading Prohibition luminary, the formidable Rev. Dr. J. B. Cranfill, publisher of Texas Baptists' prohibition newspaper and financial secretary of Baylor University.<sup>8</sup>

In an 1888 editorial carried by a nationwide Prohibitionist newspaper, Cranfill furiously warned Northern Prohibitionists to "abandon all that nonsense about 'breaking down the color line.'" In a following issue, Hicks took his stand. Hicks approached the question carefully, claiming the Northerners meant only to eliminate the color line politically, not socially. The Northern reformers simply "see no good reason why the two races should stand arrayed against each other at the ballot-box. That such is the case here in the south no-one [sic] can deny. And that it results from the war—is a fruit gathered from old battlefield's [sic], which is poisonous and destructive to the political health of this nation, cannot be seriously questioned." Hicks defended the only somewhat less incendiary position that Northerner Prohibitionists thought black and white Southerners should ignore race in their voting behavior and that "they are

right about it until some decent reason is shown why the whites and blacks in the south should vote against each other.” “How like a wet blanket” Cranfill’s rejection must be “upon the ardent zeal of Bishop Turner, Hector Jordan and other colored me who are laboring and suffering and sacrificing for the uplifting of their race—and our own.”<sup>9</sup>

Cranfill was unmoved. “With my own eyes,” he retorted days later, “in the Northern states I have seen negro [sic] and white children attending the same school, playing on the same playground, and those same children recited together in the same classes.” From there, he warned, “it is but a step to intermarriage” and “race annihilation and the end of the Anglo-Saxon.” Cranfill reminded his readers that he had said before and continued to maintain that “the negro is a lower race . . . that he is not . . . the equal of the white man and will never be.”<sup>10</sup>

Hicks did not reply. Indeed, after this famous preacher’s rebuke, he went silent on race for years. In 1915, he wrote in the *American Socialist* that Southerners needn’t dread that Socialism would be the catalyst to erase the color line because capitalism had already achieved that. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek Hicks described black and white workers digging together in the same ditch and black and white businessmen filing deeds in the same courthouse with the observation that capitalism had already achieved what white Southerners accused Socialists of seeking to do.<sup>11</sup>

Hicks got close to but did not arrive at values many on the left hold dear in our own time. He did not live in our time. He lived in Waco, Texas, in 1916, where white men burned a seventeen-year-old African American child to death on the courthouse lawn then brought their children to see his charred remains. Over a year after his neighbors tortured and murdered young Jesse Washington, Hicks ventured forth in the local paper with a column entitled “When the Mob Gets Started.” He carefully stated that he based this column on his reading of a sociology tome that analyzed mob mentality and on a sickening experience from his own youth.

"When you read the book you will get an idea of how quickly the human animal can descend from heights divine and be drawn into a mob and do things, as a member of the mob, that he could not be hired to do on his own moral responsibility as an individual." He then related a disturbing experience from his young farmhand days in Brazos County. One snarling, howling, shrieking night he lay in bed and listened in dread as the otherwise friendly neighborhood dogs ganged up on and killed a stray dog wandering into the community. After describing in gruesome detail the blood-chilling sounds he heard that night, he told his Waco readers: "The noise I heard was the noise of a mob."<sup>12</sup>

Hicks did not arrive at class-consciousness in a sprint. It took over a decade of struggle as a small farmer for him to show signs of beginning such a journey. Through his many writings in the 1880s and 1890s, we can observe that beginning.

In his twenties, he followed the conventional New South line that diversification and frugality would save the small farmer. While acknowledging that the new year of 1885 brought cries of "hard times," debt and "short crops," Hicks insisted that if only farmers would reform themselves, diversify and "live at home" their "state of affairs would be alleviated."<sup>13</sup>

The oft-repeated phrase "live at home" was a nineteenth-century phrase that would persist well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century generally used to pass judgment farmers who supposedly spent too much money at the credit merchant's store for sustenance which they could have grown in their own garden patch.

A year later, January 16, 1886, found Hicks still blaming his fellow farmers for widespread rural poverty. He then rejected the agrarian radicals' charge that railroad and corporate collusion explained cotton farmers' distress. Instead, he blamed the "credit system," or, more accurately, farmers who relied upon credit. The 29-year-old counseled greater self-restraint and to stop visiting the merchant unless one had something to trade or sell. "That's the route for me though the bridge over the next eight months be ever so shaky."<sup>14</sup>

In the spring of 1886, he took on the Farmers' Alliance plan for cooperative "Exchange Stores" which he feared would run honest merchants out of business. Once Alliance Exchange Stores were the only supplier available, Hicks predicted they would gouge farmers as badly as any privately held monopoly. He sparred with a correspondent from neighboring Reilly Springs in the *Hopkins County Echo* over the virtues of frugality and greater competition versus the pitfalls of cooperation through the Farmers' Alliance. While Hicks claimed to agree with much of the Alliance program, he feared the "misguided zeal and blind prejudice" of the "average farmer" would ruin what good was in it and warned once more about putting small town merchants out of business. Once more asserting his faith in competition, he declared that farmers "need a thousand more merchants in Sulphur Springs" not fewer. The only worthy object of the Farmers' Alliance was to educate farmers on scientific agriculture and the evils of credit accounts.<sup>15</sup>

It only took three more years of the increasingly deflationary 1880s' cotton market to chasten the young farmer. Now in his thirties and with a wife expecting their fifth child, a considerably humbled Hicks wrote a column for the local paper lamenting "honest debts." How to make a bale of cotton pay. . .

*store accounts, bank notes, doctors' and druggists' bills, taxes, [and] etc. . . . is the knottiest, stubbornest, and most harassing question that ever drove sleep from the eyes of an honest farmer. It makes him almost insensible to the needs of his family. It rises like a black mountain before his eyes whenever he looks forward and tries to plan for the future. It makes him utter groans that can be understood only by honest men, who have contracted honest debts and who have made all honest endeavors to meet those debts, and have failed. It harrows the very soul, and drives one sometimes to the verge of dementia.*

After laying out the deplorable conditions assailing the entire agricultural community, and showing genuine empathy for the farmers' creditors who would not be fully paid, Hicks uncharacteristically articulated temporary defeat. "This is not written," he admitted, "with any purpose of offering a remedy." Then he added grimly: "I shall remedy my part of it sooner or later, in the providence of God."<sup>16</sup>

This was a pivotal moment for Hicks and his young family. He heard the railroad companies' siren song of the west central rolling plains around Abilene and abandoned the beautiful if unremunerative Post Oak strip for Taylor County, a place where Mesquite bushes were often mistaken for trees. They arrived in Abilene in the dead of winter 1891 where Henrietta Elizabeth, she of the sweet smile and rosy cheeks, immediately gave birth to their sixth child.

The 34-year-old Hicks soon discovered that Taylor County land sold only by the section. He tried to convince his new neighbors that Abilene would never prosper until landowners were willing to sell smaller parcels to "the fifty-acre man" whose tilling of the soil surely "would invite rain" and lead to prosperity. Unfortunately for him, that purported connection between plowing and raining was one of the "railroads' lies" that he missed.<sup>17</sup>

The move to Taylor County was not the only big change on Hicks's horizon. He was now a true believer in the Alliance all the way to the Subtreasury Plan, the litmus test for Texas radicals. His understanding of the currency deflation then killing farmers and debtors had increased as well, but, with characteristic optimism, he thought he saw relief on the horizon through the building of a new "formidable" political party.

*All money has increased in value, all labor has decreased in value, wages have been reduced; all prices have been brought down, and debts are doubly hard to pay. And the country will not stand the contraction, and henceforth a formidable party is being built up, which is seeking and demanding relief.*<sup>18</sup>

Hicks and his Alliance district voted to send their representative to St. Louis to the founding convention of the People's Party and in support of all of the "Ocala Demands" as written.<sup>19</sup>

*Of the many varieties of 1890s populists, Hicks was of the capital-P variety meaning he saw the silverite derangement as the "shadow movement" it was and cleaved to the leftist "midroaders" and Subtreasury men, denouncing the folly of Bryan and fusion. In another change from the last decade, Hicks started to note what he considered bad behavior by preachers in their betrayals of the interests of the poor majority in favor of their wealthy supporters. In fact, he charged that the Taylor County pulpit was "almost [as] a unit against political reforms."<sup>20</sup>*

For Hicks, the Populists were the true democrats, the true heirs of Jefferson, not the plutocrats of the moment running the Texas and national Democratic Party. As a good propagandist, he reported that the Populists had "about captured" his district and that an uncle in Greer County reported, "the People's party is practically solid in that section."<sup>21</sup>

The more Hicks studied the Populist Party and the agrarian malaise to which it responded, the better he liked the Party and the less he liked farming. From his early adulthood, he had maintained a special connection to newspapers and their editors. By learning the printer's trade Hicks solved his personal farm problem while simultaneously slaking his thirst for the world of newspapers, more particularly a Populist newspaper, Abilene's the *West Texas Sentinel*. Occasionally, Hicks even got to write for the newspaper he printed. Having written steadily for over twelve years for no pay, Hicks must have been thrilled to be on a newspaper team, even from the back of the shop. This would be Hicks's lifetime career. No matter his obvious talent and growing eloquence, he spent the rest of his life in the blue-collar end of journalism.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the Populist Party and its newspapers

did not outlast the decade, and by late summer 1899, the 42-year-old father of eight sought and found employment printing the *West Texas Baptist*.<sup>23</sup>

Just before Hicks found work with the Baptists, the United States government declared war on Spain. Like people in many small towns and cities across Texas, Abileneans rallied their boys and young men to the colors in recruiting campaigns sometimes led by local pastors. Joshua Hicks would have no part of this conjoining of Christianity and nationalist zeal. Indeed, outraged at the prospect of preachers recruiting for war, he wrote and published a pamphlet denouncing their role—and any Christian's role—in the war effort. It was Hicks's position that no Christian might fight in a war and "shoot down his fellow-man" without contradicting the central message of Christ. Arguing from a Christian quietist-pacifist perspective—similar to the Amish but much at odds with his earlier Prohibitionist Party zeal—Hicks claimed that the culturally accepted religion of his own time was no Christianity at all. The more popular the church became, the less Christian it was: "it suffers most when the world treats it best."<sup>24</sup> It appears he may have had this writing in mind years later when he took great pains to claim for Socialism a purely political and secular nature. The goals of a cooperative commonwealth in no way sought to save souls but only to regulate economic behavior.

A year later found Hicks denouncing the next war, the U.S.-Filipino War. He rejected any evidence for America's *bona fides* as a Christian nation despite it being "of all the nations on the earth . . . loudest in the boast." Hicks believed that if not for dishonest leadership the "vast majority" of Americans would figure out for themselves the "moral impossibility" of America's take-over of the Philippines. After pointing out the irony of the US fight against the Filipino independence movement, Hicks went to work on his fellow Methodist, President William McKinley:

*If I were a Mohammedan, or a pagan bowing before gods of wood and stone, I would point to the Christian's Bible which says "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them," and then to the so-called Christian president and cabinet of the United States . . . and then to the sickening slaughter of the human beings in the Philippine Islands . . . and then thank my god, whoever or whatever he might be, that I was not as other men are."*<sup>25</sup>

The turn-of-the-twentieth century found Hicks politically homeless with Populist demise. While still working his day-job at the *West Texas Baptist* he started up a small newspaper of his own to tout the brand-new Farmers' Union just born in Rains County. This paper he called *The Farmers' Journal* and it was the direct predecessor of the largest Socialist newspaper in Texas. As others have shown, the Farmers' Union soon devolved into a power struggle between "actual farmers" and landlords. Choosing sides in that fight was no contest for Hicks, although he still had no political party with which to identify. Nevertheless, his powerful optimism about the possibilities for human society remained strong. He believed that "generations of the future will live in an era of good will and justice and happiness and peace such as the world has never known." The first year of the new century nearly killed Hicks; he came down with typhoid fever and could not work for weeks. In the interim, his fifteen-and-twelve-years-old sons, apparently already apprentices, filled in for him at the *West Texas Baptist* print shop.<sup>26</sup>

Hicks's journey continued toward a class-conscious critique of the new Texas political economy taking shape around him. He viewed the 1902 poll tax proposal with alarm and wanted everyone to know that "the true object of the poll tax" was simply "disfranchisement." This was in marked contrast to some of the more ambitious former Populist politicians who earned their way back into the Democrats' good graces by embracing racial disfranchisement.<sup>27</sup>

Hicks's *Farmers' Journal* more or less held its own from 1904 to 1911. He slowly gave up on organized religion while retaining some belief in "an afterlife." At some point in the first decade of the twentieth century, he joined the brand-new Texas Socialist Party. Founded in Bonham in 1898 by a radical ex-populist, the independent Texas party joined with Eugene Debs' Social Democracy in 1900 and combined with other groups in 1901 to become the Socialist Party of America. Hicks had denied being a member of that party in 1901, but its class-conscious message drew him thereafter. By 1908, he was proclaiming his allegiance to the Debsian party in the pages of his paper. By then Hicks had a sufficiently large readership that "Colonel" Dick Maples approvingly noted his conversion in the pages of the *National Rip-Saw*.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly thereafter, he handed over *The Farmers' Journal* to an enterprising trio from Hallettsville, father-and-son E. O. and E. R. Meitzen and IWW agitator and Irish immigrant Thomas A. Hickey. Some controversy clouded this transaction. Davidson and James R. Green present it as a buy-out or merger. The Abilene newspaper reported that Hicks would stay on and regularly contribute a page. And, indeed this was true for the first few months of *The Rebel's* storied run. His weekly feature, "Hicks's Page" pursued Socialist themes of interest to rural Texans. He made a careful case for Socialism's accessibility to believers and non-believers alike, arguing that when understood correctly it was a secular and religiously neutral vehicle for social justice. Accordingly, you could be devout and be a good Socialist or you could be an atheist and be a good Socialist. "But you can't be a Socialist and believe that any individual should have to pay any other individual for the use of the soil to make a living. Keep your Socialism on straight."<sup>29</sup>

Having dispensed with any religious controversy to his liking, Hicks moved on to another sore topic. In spite of cultural aspirations to the contrary, on small farms much of the cotton production required the labor of women and children. He asked

over four dozen “reliable farmers” to estimate the portion of the cotton crop resulting from the labor “of women, and their little children who ought to be in school” and reported—with obvious moral outrage—that his farmers self-reported an average of 53 percent. This appeared in midsummer, 1911.<sup>30</sup>

“Hick’s Page” abruptly ended and never returned. From the pages of the *Texarkana Socialist*, the nationally known Texas writer Nat L. Hardy opined that Hickey and the Meitzens cheated Hicks. “They took J. L. Hicks’s subscription list and gave him in exchange a ten-dollar-a-week job. But J. L. Hicks is an honest man and has trust in his fellows and therefore did not bind Hickey and Meitzen with a written contract and after six months they fired Hicks without notice.”<sup>31</sup>

Dissolving his relationship with *The Rebel* appears not to have slowed down Hicks’s agitation for Socialism even a little. During his last years in Abilene he contributed columns extolling the virtues of Socialism in numerous small-town and rural Texas newspapers and continued his commentary on all things Abilene in letters to the *Abilene Reporter*. Hicks scolded the *Abilene Reporter* for inviting only members of the “25,000 Club,” the city’s “heaviest tax payers,” to express their opinions regarding a new city charter. He contended the newspaper was “asking the man who won in the game to name the rules under which the loser must continue to play.” Worse yet, such elitism contradicted “Jefferson’s democratic ideals.” The *Reporter* printed Hicks’s critique but did not spare him in its reply. “Mr. Hicks is an expert at creating mountains out of mole hills . . . For years Mr. Hicks has stood as the champion of the laboring man, particularly the man whose taxes is confined to the amount of a poll tax receipt.” The *Reporter*, surely a younger man, took a gratuitous swipe at Hicks as someone old enough to know better because he “is no spring chicken.” The Hicks family had been in Abilene for over twenty years and Joshua Hicks was now 54-years-old. Soon, he would be moving again.<sup>32</sup>

Lured to Waco by the prospect of starting a new—and

short-lived—publication, he and his family stayed on after he obtained a new job with the *Waco Times-Herald* as a printer and proofreader.<sup>33</sup>

Hicks would spend almost all of the last decade of his life in Waco. This freethinking Socialist would not have seen the irony of making his home in the Lone Star Vatican. He had long admired Reddin Andrews, the two-time Socialist nominee for Texas governor, and Andrews was as good a Baptist as you could be, a graduate of Southern Seminary, an ordained pastor and former president of Baylor, no less. And Hicks loved him so much he named his youngest daughter after him.<sup>34</sup>

Waco brought its heartaches. His second oldest child died shortly after their arrival. She was twenty-nine, single and lived at home. Another daughter was deaf and could not speak; she would never leave the family home. The other six children grew up, married and moved on. He took obvious pride in his sons. Two went into typographical work and one, Louis Hicks, became prominent in the twentieth century Texas labor movement.<sup>35</sup>

The propaganda build-up to U.S. entry into World War I found Hicks sticking to his old pacifist position. To Waco's many pastors he wryly observed that perhaps before they joined the President's preparedness campaign they should be aware that "there seems to be some contrast between Wilson's peace program and that of Isaiah" with America's plowshares being beaten into swords.<sup>36</sup>

Years after the zenith of Texas Socialism had waned and former radicals like the Meitzens and Tom Hickey moved into new ventures, Hicks kept the faith. In 1919 he engaged the editor of the *Waco Times-Herald* in a vigorous debate over which system best protected individualism, capitalism or Socialism. The *Times-Herald* asserted that it chose individualism over socialism and the editor challenged Hicks to state why capitalism was not individualism. Hicks began with an orthodox definition of democratic socialism but moved on to a more imaginative argument claiming for Socialism "freer and more unshackled

individualism." Hicks argued that when the capitalist system established laws allowing one man to determine whether to hire or fire a thousand men, "to feed them out of the products of their own labor or starve them by withholding those products" then, there was capitalism but not individualism. The *Times-Herald* called Hicks "beloved brother" and observed patronizingly that he "discusses every question in fine spirit and to intelligent purpose" and that "we recognize in Mr. Hicks one who loves his fellow-man" before roundly rejecting his arguments with a rebuttal from Hicks's own eighteenth century hero: "That government is best that governs least."<sup>37</sup>

Hicks kept on writing and preaching his radical gospel of Socialism, nonviolence, female suffrage and the brotherhood of man during his last years in Waco.<sup>38</sup>

He spent his final year in Dallas. He and his wife moved to the northern metropolis to be near their sons Jesse and Louis, both typesetters and union activists. He had been a night sky-watcher for decades and his amateur astronomical reading and observations seemed to increase as he aged. This did not, however, diminish his zeal in fighting for the working class. Seven months before he died he denounced the rise of Dallas' open shop movement in the pages of the *Dallas Craftsman*. "Open shop' may sound nice to the general public," he wrote, "but its real meaning" is that the union hall will be henceforth will be "closed tight forever." "It means that the lone individual worker, unidentified with any other worker in the whole wide world, shall go to a closed corporation shop and make an entirely one-sided bargain for a job by which to keep from starving to death."<sup>39</sup> Less than three weeks before he died he sent one last epistle out into posterity: "Sooner or later the world will have to come to public ownership of its basic industries as the only remedy for inequality and inequity of distribution." This appeared on October 11, 1921. Eighteen days later he died.<sup>40</sup>

Three years before he died, he wrote one last poem contrasting his love for the night sky and for astronomy to the war-and-

pain-wracked earth below it, In spite of the earth's "stench of death" and "blast and explosion and broken wings and the aching wonder – Oh! Why these things?" the aging ex-farmer and print shop worker comforted himself with this prospect:

*Night wind, blow the smoke from beneath these stars;  
Let me see Vega, Capella and Mars  
Their glitter and gleam and majestic sweep  
Drive away all thought of the things that creep  
They are singing love's sweet, celestial song.  
I have looked at the earth too long.<sup>41</sup>*

#### (Endnotes)

1. In my first encounter with Joshua L. Hicks, I missed the importance of the changing nature of his spiritual journey and ascribed 1880s-1890s motives to his 1910s writings. His final adoption of the Socialist Party occurred after he left the church. Several years later, Hicks articulated a belief in Socialism's secular utility based in a rational search for a more just and humane society without regard to religious belief. Nevertheless, his roots in primitive Christianity with its intimations of human equality remained an influence. Kyle Wilkison, *Yeomen, Sharecroppers and Socialists: Plain Folk Protest in Texas 1870-1914* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 141; Joshua Hicks, "Hicks's Page," *Rebel*, (Hallettsville, TX), July 1, 1911, 4.
2. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Kevin D. Williamson, "Chaos in the Family, Chaos in the State: The White Working Class's Dysfunction," *National Review*, March 17, 2016, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/432876/donald-trump-white-working-class-dysfunction-real-opportunity-needed-not-trump>; Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking, 2016); Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and*

*White Liberals* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006); for the racialization of Texas elites' contempt for the white working class see Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) and Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); for an example of painting with a broadly stereotypical brush, see Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 27; for a recent example of the "culture in crisis" explanation, see J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

3. "Clarke County," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1204> (Accessed October 10, 2016); Joshua L. Hicks, "Family Record" loose leaf typescript, Scrapbook 1, Hicks Family Papers, AR228, Box 1, Folder 228-1-1, Special Collections, The University of Texas at Arlington Library [Hereafter Scrapbook 1 or Scrapbook 2 with page numbers.]; Clarke County, Alabama, Manuscript Census, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; Clarke County, Alabama, Manuscript Census, Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; T. H. Ball, *A glance into the great South-east, or, Clarke County, Alabama and its surroundings: from 1540 to 1877* (Grove Hill, Alabama, 1882), 354-355; Scrapbook 1, 197 and 227.
4. Hopkins County, Texas, Manuscript Census, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880; Scrapbook 1, 249.
5. Untitled, love poem to his future wife dated September 12, 1880, two years before their marriage. Front matter loose leaf scraps in Scrapbook 1.
6. "Family Record" front matter loose leaf typescript, Scrapbook 1.
7. "How Strange," *The Patron of Husbandry* (Columbus, Mississippi), August 5, 1882, 2.
8. Handbook of Texas Online, Travis L. Summerlin, "Cranfill, James Britton Buchanan Boone," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fcr07>. (Accessed October 05, 2016.)
9. Scrapbook 1, 153-154.
10. Scrapbook 1, 155.

11. Davidson, xxvii; "As to Race Equality," *American Socialist*, clipping, Scrapbook 1, 245.
12. Davidson writes that he searched in vain for any commentary from Hicks on the Waco Horror or on race in general after 1915 but it is clear that his 1918 "Mob" piece was indirectly responding to his struggle to understand the horrifying behavior of his neighbors in the lynch mob death of Jesse Washington. "When the Mob Gets Started," *Waco Times Herald*, April 17, 1918; Scrapbook 1, 283.
13. Scrapbook 1, 10.
14. Scrapbook 1, 18.
15. Scrapbook 1, 19-23.
16. Scrapbook 1, 161.
17. Scrapbook 1, 176.
18. Scrapbook 1, 177-179.
19. Scrapbook 1, 196.
20. Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 215-220; Scrapbook 1, 183, 188-189; Scrapbook 2, 15 and 28.
21. Scrapbook 1, 193.
22. Davidson, xxiv.
23. Scrapbook 1, 178.
24. Joshua L. Hicks, *Christianity, War, and Politics: Can a Man be a Christian and Kill his Fellow Man?* (Abilene: J. L. Hicks, 1898), 3, 18-19, Folder AR228-1-11, Hicks Papers.
25. Scrapbook 1, 203-204
26. "Former Resident of Abilene Dies at Dallas," *Abilene Daily Reporter* (Abilene, Tex.), Vol. 34, No. 256, Ed. 1, November 1, 1921, 3; James Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Scrapbook 1, 208-210;

27. Scrapbook 2, 78; Robert Worth Miller, "Building a Progressive Coalition in Texas: The Populist Reform Democrat Rapprochement, 1900-1907." *Journal of Southern History* 52 (May 1986): 163-182.
28. *Abilene Daily Reporter*, November 1, 1921, 3; Davidson, xxv; Scrapbook 1, 208 and 219.
29. "Hicks's Page," *The Rebel*, (Hallettsville, Texas), July 1, 1911, 4.
30. "Hicks's Page," July 22, 1911, 4.
31. Scrapbook 1, 221; Green, 138; Davidson, xxv; Scrapbook 2, 103.
32. Scrapbook 1, 221-222.
33. *Abilene Daily Reporter*, November 1, 1921, 3
34. "Family Record," Scrapbook 1.
35. "Mathews Family History Exchange," [https://mathewsfamilyhistory.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/chart\\_-clarke-co-mathews-3-gen-4-2007-8-x-11.pdf](https://mathewsfamilyhistory.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/chart_-clarke-co-mathews-3-gen-4-2007-8-x-11.pdf); (Accessed November 26, 2016.); Scrapbook 1 and 2.
36. Hicks, "Christ's Attitude on Defense," *Waco Morning News*, March 3, 1916, clipping, Scrapbook 2, n.p.
37. Scrapbook 1, 269-273.
38. Scrapbook 1, 323; Wilkison, 140-143.
39. Scrapbook 1, 288.
40. Scrapbook 2, 61.
41. Scrapbook 1, 258.