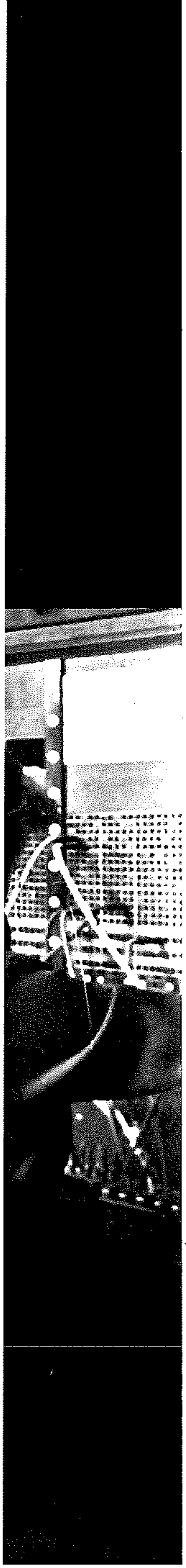
Part One

Monopoly and Upheaval

1877–1914



The great railroad strikes of the summer of 1877, as the young labor leader Samuel Gompers noted, sounded an alarm that heralded a new era of conflict and division in the nation. Issues of slavery and emancipation had preoccupied Americans' minds during the previous decades, as the bloody Civil War led to Reconstruction — a time when the freedpeople in the post–Civil War South not only gained their freedom but also secured U.S. citizenship, the right to vote and hold elective office, access to education, and some modest measure of economic and religious independence. However, in the early months of 1877, the newly installed administration of Republican president Rutherford B. Hayes agreed to withdraw the few remaining federal troops that were keeping order in the southern states in exchange for Democratic party support for Hayes's contested election. As Reconstruction crumbled, industrial capitalism flourished, and the nation's working men and women fought to find a place for themselves amid the extraordinary economic, political, and social changes of the next four decades.

The United States became the world's most powerful industrial nation during the years between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of World War I, boasting massive manufacturing enterprises and unprecedented productivity. In this same period, the nation launched a war with Spain that resulted in U.S. domination of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Cuba, and Hawaii. The face of America also changed, as millions of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Latin America poured into the United States after 1900, feeding industrial capitalism's seemingly insatiable appetite for new workers. Urban America took modern form and shape as the populations of New York and Chicago swelled beyond a million residents each and contemporary transportation, sanitation, and safety systems came into being. New consumer products, new means of mass distribution, and new forms of recreation reshaped everyday life in the city and the countryside.

U.S. capitalism enabled the growth of economic monopoly, unimaginable individual wealth, and unbridled political power. It also made many Americans — as well as the millions of other individuals who lived and worked under U.S. control in the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and the islands in the Pacific Ocean — dependent on wages or on market relations.

Americans were sharply divided on the meaning of the changes in their nation. On one side stood industrial capitalists and their political and intellectual supporters. They justified capitalists' newly won wealth and power with an ideology that celebrated acquisitive individualism, free markets, and the "survival of the fittest." On the other side stood the working men and women whose labor powered the system—African Americans, native-born white Americans, and European, Latin American, Caribbean, and Asian immigrants. They embraced the ideal of collectivity and the power of mutual rather than individual action to blunt the devastating impact of industrial capitalism on their work, family life, and communities. Of course, many Americans—small business owners, machine politicians, white-collar workers—did not entirely agree with either position, siding with industrial capitalists in some circumstances and with working people in others. And working people themselves were often divided along lines of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and region.

As the dizzying growth of industrial capitalism transformed people and communities, cultures of collectivity arose. From those bases, working people launched a series of violent class wars that were unprecedented in the nation's history. They carved the names and dates of individual battles into the public consciousness: Haymarket (1886), Homestead and Coeur D'Alene (1892), Pullman (1894), Lawrence (1912), Paterson (1913), and Ludlow (1914). Radical ideologies embraced by workers craving change, including populism, feminism, anarchism, and socialism, animated many of these conflicts. By 1900, many of the most fundamental challenges to industrial capitalism in the Gilded Age—the Knights of Labor and the Populists, in particular—had been beaten back.

At the same time, this heady brew of labor struggle, political unrest, and a spate of tragic factory fires and coal mine explosions fostered a belief, shared by workers, middle-class professionals, and even some business leaders, that someone needed to take action against the problems caused by capitalist excesses. This conviction drove a series of reform movements, often spearheaded by women, which collectively came to be known as progressivism. Progressivism articulated a modern notion that government should play a central role in regulating the nation's social, economic, and political ills. Reformers successfully addressed some of the issues facing the nation: child labor, factory safety, tainted food and drugs, political corruption, and unchecked economic monopoly. Women pushed harder than ever for their right to vote. But the progressive movement did little for African Americans, who saw only regression from the gains they had won during Reconstruction.

As war loomed over Europe, the particular concerns that gave rise to progressivism would increasingly take a back seat to concern over the spreading international crisis. Nonetheless, progressive reform inaugurated a new era in U.S. politics, one in which the federal government took some small steps toward its now familiar role as guarantor of economic stability and the basic safety and health of its citizens.

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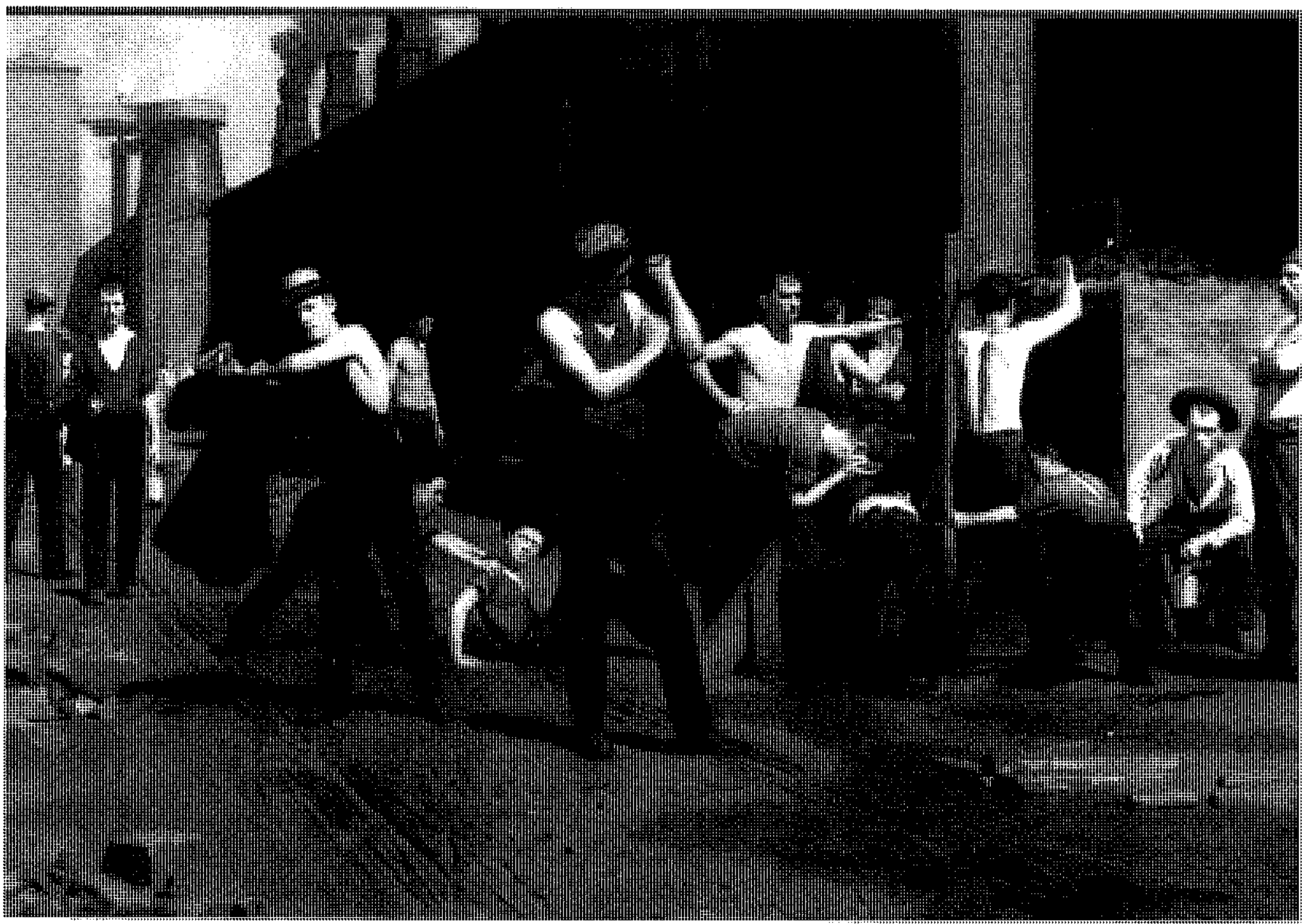
Progress and Poverty: Industrial Capitalism in the Gilded Age

1877–1893



The Ironworkers' Noontime
Few painters chose industrial work as a subject in the late nineteenth century, because its conditions seemed inappropriate for a medium that tended to highlight noble and aesthetic themes. Thomas Anshutz's painting, completed around 1880, is therefore an unusual work, realistically portraying the weariness of skilled ironworkers at a nail factory in Wheeling, West Virginia, while also celebrating the workers' strength and pride in their craft. Thomas Pollock Anshutz, 1880, oil on canvas, 17⅛ × 24 inches—The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd.

The NORTH'S VICTORY in the Civil War inaugurated a period of extraordinary growth and consolidation for the American economy. With the nation's political boundaries restored, northern manufacturers regained access to southern markets, and dramatic industrial development brought the United States into a new era. Within fifteen years of the war's end, Andrew Carnegie built his first steel plant, John D. Rockefeller organized Standard Oil, and Alexander Graham Bell began manufacturing telephones. By 1893, the United States was the world's leading industrial power, producing more than the combined total of its three largest competitors: England, France, and Germany. Leading entrepreneurs such as Carnegie and Rockefeller became unimaginably wealthy. The ostentatious display of wealth combined with cultural superficiality and political corruption inspired Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner to dub the era "the Gilded Age" in a novel by that name.

The nation's postwar economic growth owed much to its abundant natural resources: rich farmland provided food for a growing urban workforce, and extensive coal, iron, and mineral deposits supplied raw materials to mills and factories. During and immediately after the war, Republicans—backed by powerful iron manufacturers and coal mine owners—had passed laws to stimulate industrial growth, enabling wealthy investors and industrialists to exploit the nation's resources. High import tariffs protected American industry from foreign competition, and federal loans and huge land grants encouraged railroad expansion. Although their legislation served the wealthy, Republicans paid lip service to the key role of labor in the expanding economy. That combination of probusiness legislation and proworker rhetoric helped to ensure the party's political dominance in the postwar decades.

The phenomenal growth of the American economy in the nineteenth century also had a dark underside, which a short, red-haired newspaperman named Henry George experienced firsthand. George lost his job as a printer in the depression of 1857. He then launched a successful, crusading San Francisco newspaper, only to see it wiped out in the panic of 1873. In the aftermath of the epochal railroad strikes of 1877, George redirected his crusading spirit toward writing a book that would expose what he saw as the fundamental paradox of his day: the persistence of horrifying poverty amid stunning economic progress. In 1880, George moved from California to New York to promote his newly published book and to look for work. Like George, post–Civil War Americans lived under a single, national economic system that shaped the lives of everyone, East and West, North and South—albeit not always in the same ways. And as the title of his book, *Progress and Poverty*, indicated, this tidal wave of industrial capitalism brought devastation to the lives of millions even as it made the United States a global economic power. "The 'tramp' comes with the locomotive," he wrote in burning indignation, "and the almshouses and prisons are as surely the marks of 'material progress' as are costly dwellings, rich warehouses, and magnificent churches."

The Industrialization of America

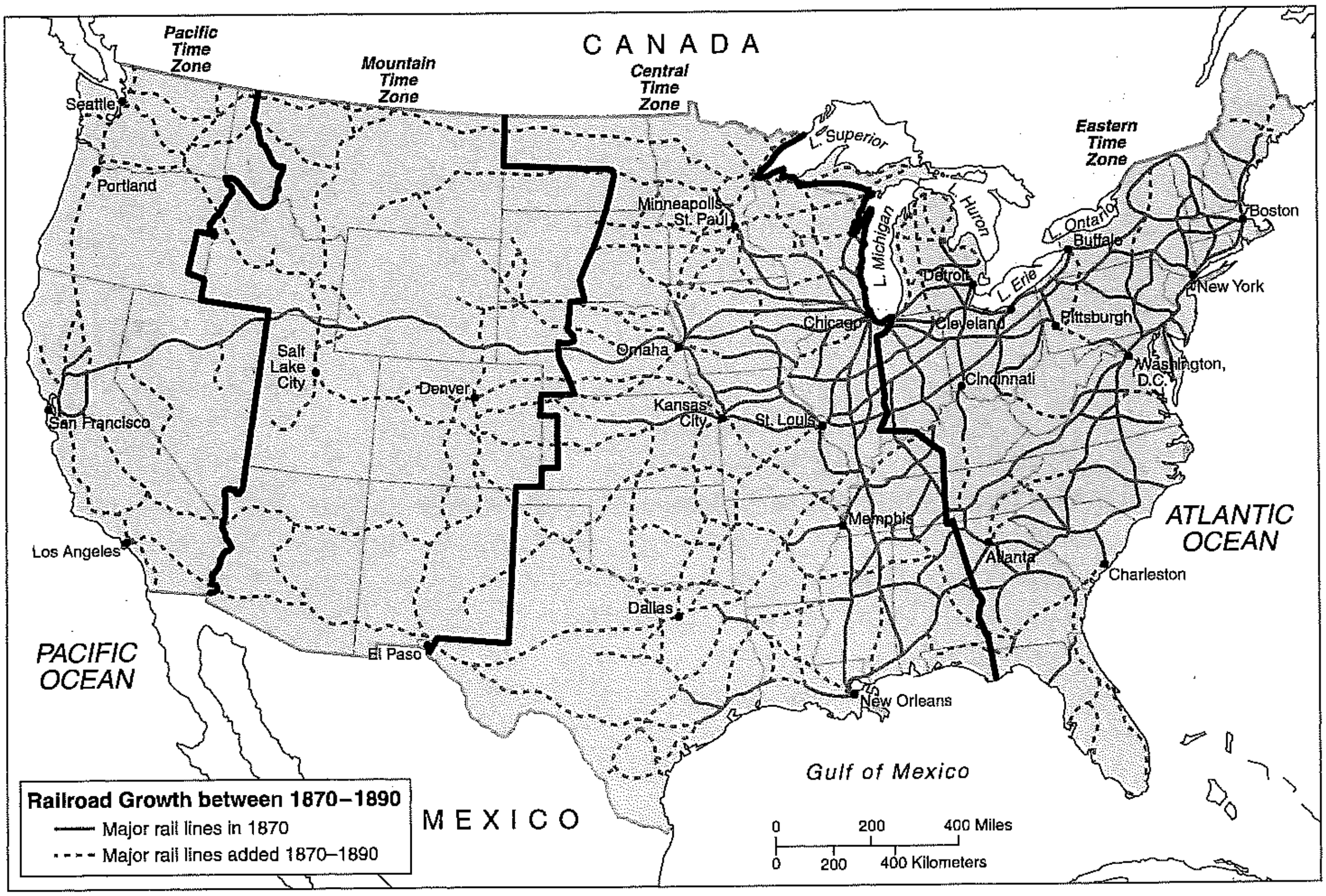
The railroads provided both the model and the engine for this industrial transformation. But the railroads and other giant industrial enterprises that spread across the nation in these years moved at a fitful pace dictated by an unstable economy, which punctuated the boom years with periods of dark depression. Despite this unevenness, the larger outlines of an unprecedented process of change could be glimpsed—from agriculture to industry, from household and artisan to factory production, from water and animal power to fossil fuels, from country to city, from economic independence to wage dependency, from the homeland of one's ancestors to a strange new land. How one experienced this new urban-industrial world depended on your class, race, gender, ethnicity, region, and age. As Henry George knew all too well, America's working people not only built America, but also paid the price for the economic transformation of the late nineteenth century.

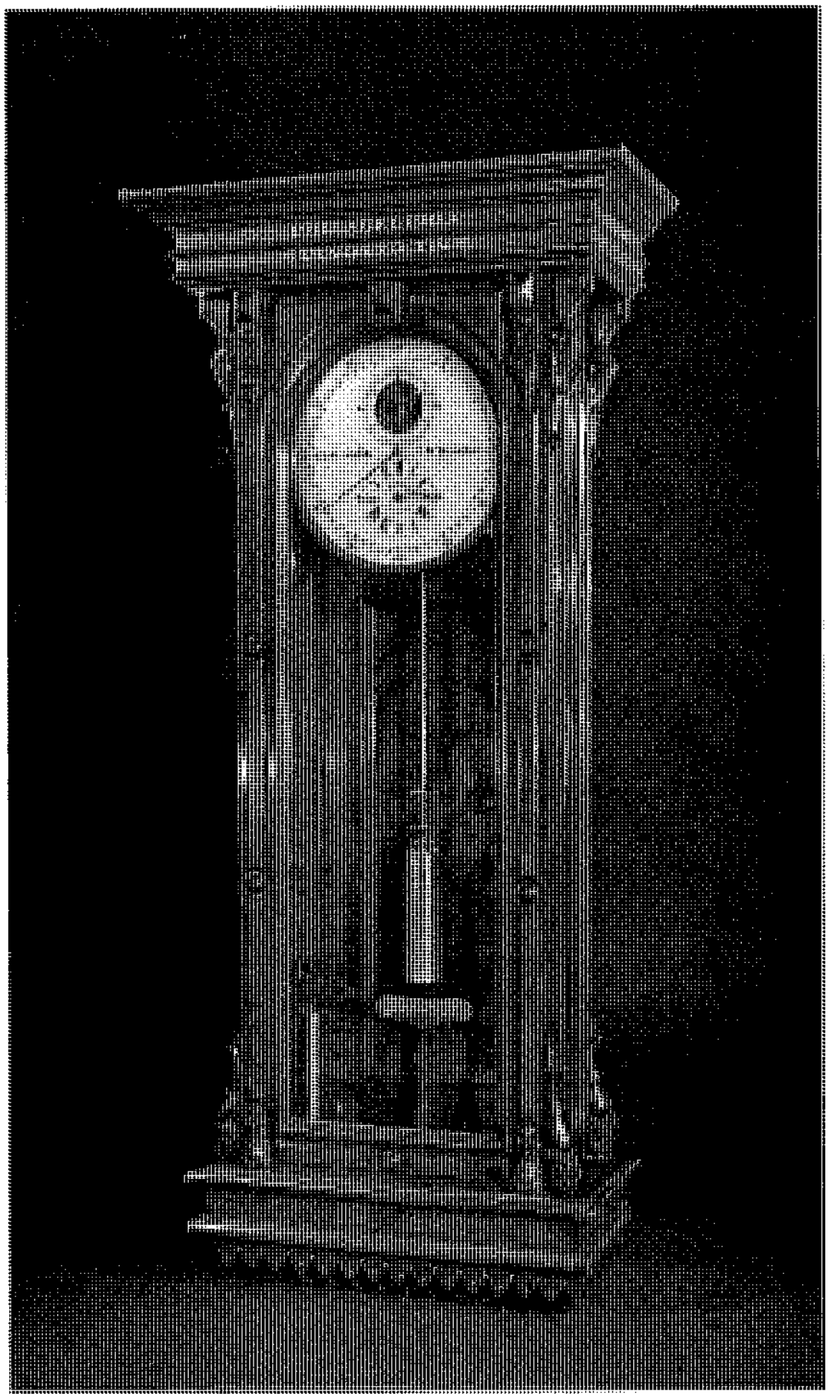
Building a Railroad System in an Unstable Economy The explosion of industrial growth depended on the dramatic expansion of the railroads. In 1869, workers for the Union Pacific and Central Pacific completed the transcontinental link. The 125,000 miles of track that would be laid in the next twenty-five years would give the United States the most extensive transportation system in the world, promoting economic development across the continent (Map 1.1).

Laying those thousands of miles of track was hard, dirty work. All over the country, bosses recruited workers, oversaw their work, and organized the camps where they lived. Irish immigrants filled the ranks of the early railroad workforce. Chinese work gangs predominated in western railroad work during the 1860s and 1870s. Japanese firms provided laborers to northwestern railroads. In the Southwest, agents recruited laborers in Mexican border towns and turned them over to railroad contractors. In West Virginia and Virginia, Italians brought in by New York *padrones* (bosses) did the work; farther south, white bosses patrolled as young African Americans laid track.

Railroad systems required new kinds of organization and coordination as well as new tracks. Railroad executives were the first modern salaried business managers, employees with little or no financial interest in the companies they served. Even before the Civil War, these managers had developed entirely new kinds of accounting procedures, reporting practices, and channels of authority that enabled their organizations to operate across broad geographic expanses. In the 1870s and 1880s, they had to devise uniform

MAP 1.1 Railroads Span the Nation, 1870–1890
The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 marked the start rather than the finish of the railroad construction boom. In the next two decades, the nation's railroad network almost tripled in size. By 1890, the United States had 164,000 miles of railroad track and the most extensive transportation network in the world. But the system continued to grow, and it reached a peak of 254,000 miles in 1964.





Railroad Time, Standard Time

This E. Howard Wall Regulator clock hung in the offices of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Railroads spurred standardization in several facets of industrial life: rail equipment, business organization, and train schedules. Until 1883, Americans followed solar time, each locality setting clocks at noon on the basis of when the sun reached its highest point. However, each railroad maintained a single time across its entire line, leading to discrepancies in the schedules of competing lines as well as in localities across the continent. In 1883, a group of railroad superintendents instituted the new system of standard time with four time zones across the continental United States. Wall Regulator, c. 1880, E. Howard Clock Co., Boston, Massachusetts—National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

standards and procedures that would allow cars loaded with manufactured products to move freely from one rail line to another.

Railroads operated on a chaotic system of local and regional times, each set by the sun. A passenger might arrive in New York at 1:30 Pittsburgh time and still catch a train leaving that city at 1:15 New York time. To bring order out of this chaos, in 1883, the railroads adopted the four standard time zones that are still used today. Three years later, the railroads finally implemented a standard track gauge, which enabled cars to switch easily from one rail line to another. Then the biggest railroads helped to shape the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, which codified accounting methods so that goods could move unhindered across the country.

The effects of the railroads' expansion rippled throughout the nation. Small producers who had once dominated local markets—for example, a Cincinnati maker of iron stoves—faced more distant competition. Industries feeding the railroads' enormous demands for iron, steel, stone, and lumber also expanded. In 1882, nine-tenths of the nation's steel went into rails, and about a quarter of its annual timber production went into crossties. And because railroads enabled producers to sell to consumers across the continent, manufacturers produced larger quantities and experimented with new, large-scale production processes. The Bessemer converter, which transformed raw iron into steel at a relatively low cost, helped to increase steel output, which was ten times greater in 1892 than in 1877. Other basic industries grew, too; the output of copper multiplied by seven and that of crude oil by four during the same years.

Despite an expanding market, America's late-nineteenth-century economy was profoundly unstable. The cost of building the railroads was unprecedented. Pursuing huge commissions and profits from every aspect of the business, investment bankers acted as agents for railroads seeking capital, as brokers for investors, as members of the railroads' boards of directors, and as investors of their own firms' money. The firm of Jay Cooke, one of the chief railroad speculators, became overextended in a time of unregulated credit and collapsed in 1873. It was so large, so central to railroad financing, and so tied to prominent politicians that its failure triggered a financial panic. The New York Stock Exchange closed for a week, and across the country, banks failed as people scrambled to get their money out.

Then followed five years of the most severe depression America had seen. One million workers lost their jobs; many faced starvation, and others tramped the land seeking relief and employment. Railroad building virtually stopped. Nearly 50,000 firms closed their doors. An upswing in the late 1870s brought a brief return to prosperity, but industrial expansion was again undercut by another (but less devastating) depression lasting from 1882 to 1885 (Figure 1.1).

The "business cycle," this boom-and-bust pattern of alternating rapid growth and sharp depression, characterized rapidly developing industrial capitalism. Even during an economic boom, few wage workers—even the highly skilled—could count on full-time, year-round work. Businessmen faced similar uncertainty. Those who avoided outright failure grappled with a long-term decline in the prices of manufactured goods; from 1866 to 1890, average prices for products dropped by over half. This decline affected nearly every sector of the economy, slashing both profits and wages.

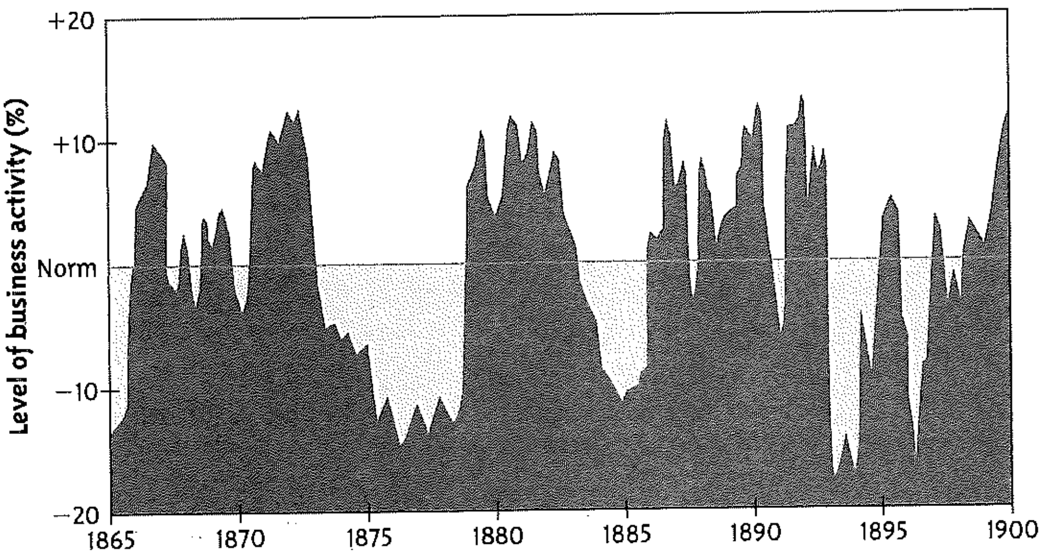
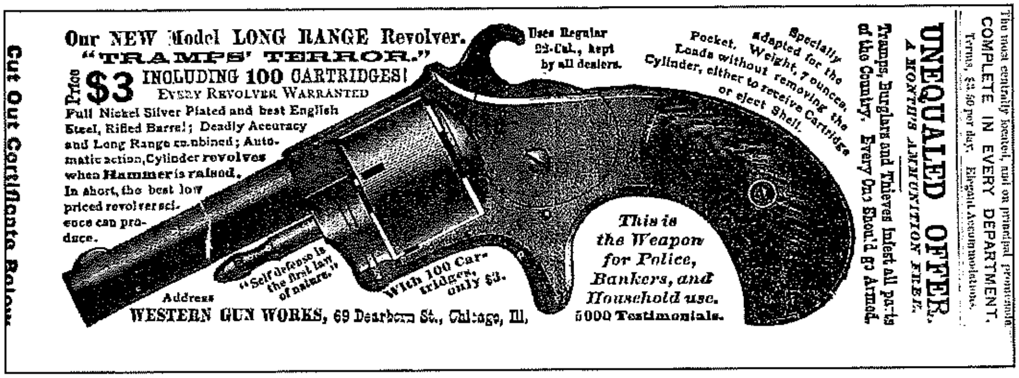


FIGURE 1.1 An Unstable Economy
The late nineteenth century was an era of explosive growth and devastating depression. The boom-and-bust cycle of industrial capitalism resulted in three major depressions—those of 1873–1879, 1882–1885, and 1893–1897—and shrouded the so-called Gilded Age.

Rapid growth, cutthroat competition, and plummeting prices went hand in hand. Railroad companies had to pay high fixed costs to maintain equipment and track as well as substantial interest on the bonds that had financed their construction. Given these strong incentives to continue operations, managers dropped rates to rock bottom. Over the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, freight prices fell by 70 percent, severely squeezing railroad profits. As railroad rates plummeted, so did wholesale prices because transportation costs made up such a large share of the final cost of manufactured goods. The new industrial system held out the hope of material plenty, but it was anything but predictable.

The Emergence of Urban-Industrial Life As railroads and industries developed, citizens from all walks of life became increasingly dependent on the financial ups and downs of companies representing huge concentrations of money and power. Americans found their accustomed ways of living and working overturned. In just over thirty years of industrial growth, a modern working class and a new business elite had emerged in a nation that had once been dominated by farmers, merchants, and small-town artisans. Wide-scale poverty emerged at the same time; the human misery that had horrified American observers of English industrialization now scarred the United States. "We are fast drifting to that condition of society which preceded the downfall of [ancient] Sparta, Macedonia, Athens, and Rome," wrote a railroad carpenter in the late 1870s, "where a few were very rich, and the many very poor."



"Tramps' Terror"

To some Americans, the unemployed who wandered the country in search of work during the 1870s posed a threat to order and safety. The "tramp menace," many argued, required a repressive response, and advertisements like this exploited the pervasive fear. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 7, 1877—American Social History Project.

With industrialization came a transition from household and artisan to factory production, a change that affected the daily lives of most Americans. By the eve of the Civil War, most people were buying and wearing manufactured textiles instead of weaving homespun. By the 1890s, many other consumer goods were factory-made—not only long-standing craft products such as soap and furniture, but also items that nobody had ever made by hand, such as kerosene lamps and sewing machines.

The change from home to factory production went along with a fundamental shift from agriculture to industry. Before the Civil War, eight out of ten Americans lived in rural areas. But the balance shifted over the next decades as farm machinery dramatically increased productivity. Fewer farmers could feed more industrial workers. Manufacturing grew dramatically; the number of factory laborers almost tripled between 1860 and 1890 and nearly doubled again by 1910 (Figure 1.2).

The shift from agriculture to industry also accelerated the decline of self-employment and the rise of wage work. In 1860, half of American workers were self-employed, and the other half earned wages. Many still believed that hard work and individual sacrifice would pave the way to economic independence. Industrial growth after the Civil War frustrated these hopes, and by 1900, two-thirds of the American workers depended on wages. Writing in the 1880s, Joseph Buchanan, a Colorado printer, recalled that an industrious and economical worker could have bought a little business in the 1860s. "Today the opportunity to start in his business for himself has been thrust from him by the greedy hand of the great manufacturers. . . . The man who can rise from the wage condition in these days must catch a windfall from his uncle or [find] a bank unlocked."

Industrialization after the Civil War involved another profound transformation: from water power and animal power to fossil fuels. Coal had been used extensively since the 1840s, but its use expanded exponentially during the decades after the war, as did that of the newer fuels, oil and gas. No longer did Americans rely on oxen and mules or rushing streams powering water mills for energy needs. Instead, they extracted energy sources from the earth, using expensive technologies, and shipped them long distances by rail. Mining companies ravaged the land they exploited, and fossil fuels polluted the air as they burned.

Manufacturers using coal and steam no longer had to locate factories alongside rivers and could instead choose sites for their access to railroads, raw materials, consumer markets, and a ready supply of workers. Industrial growth therefore centered in cities, which grew twice as fast as the nation's population as a whole. In 1860, only New York, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn had more than 250,000 inhabitants. Thirty years later, eleven cities surpassed that size, and Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York each topped one million. "We cannot all live in cities," newspaper editor Horace Greeley mused, "yet nearly all seem determined to do so." The modern American city that emerged during these decades offered such essential urban services as professional fire and police forces, sewers and garbage disposal, large hospitals, and public transportation systems.

The big cities housed both great wealth and foul slums. Rapid expansion bred overcrowding and squalor in unplumbed tenements, while businessmen's mansions boasted marble floors and mother-of-pearl washbasins. But between these extremes were skilled workers and members of a distinctive new middle socioeconomic stratum. Middle-class Americans were generally descended from families that had lived in America for generations or had immigrated from the British Isles; they worked as self-employed businesspeople, as professionals, or in the office jobs created by expanding corporations. They lived in growing suburban neighborhoods, joined there by the best-paid skilled workers and their families, who moved to escape the noise and dirt of downtown industrial districts.

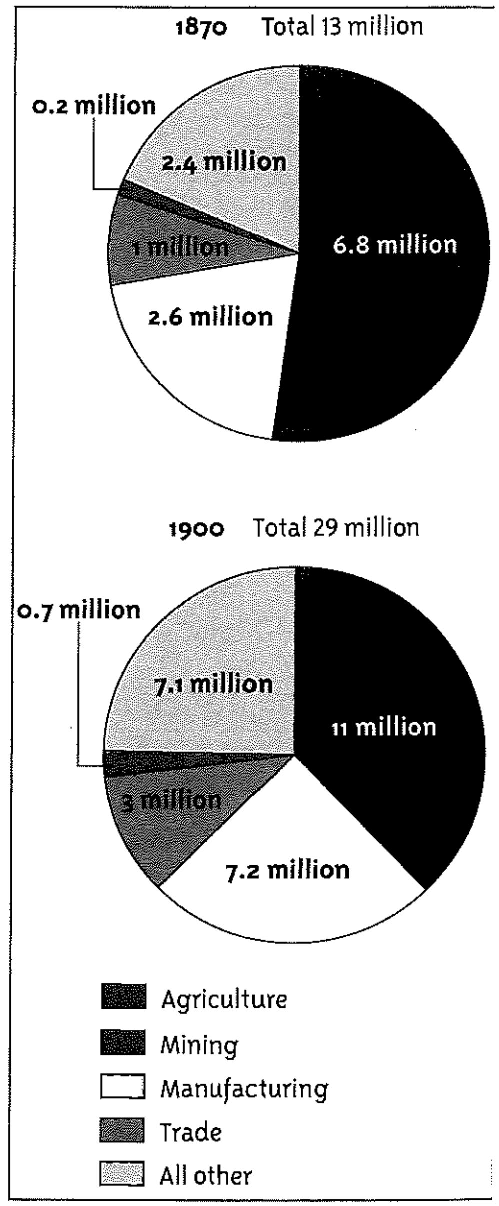


FIGURE 1.2 From Agriculture to Industry: A Changing Workforce

As the nation industrialized between 1870 and 1900, the labor force more than doubled, largely through immigration. The biggest increases came in manufacturing, which almost tripled.

The new, giant business and government organizations produced most of the new office jobs. Before 1880, only a handful of large firms, such as Western Union and Montgomery Ward, operated on a national scale. By 1890, however, a number of industrial enterprises had begun to sell such products as cigarettes, soap, matches, oatmeal, and other processed foods to a national market. This required not only expanded productive capacity, but also bigger office staffs. Bureaucracies developed similarly in national government to perform tasks such as processing the mounting numbers of patent applications and the pension claims of Civil War veterans and their widows and children.

Both national companies and government bureaucracies created new kinds of work that was mechanized during the 1880s by the typewriter, which produced letters and memoranda three times faster than writing with

Bandit's Roost

Great disparities between wealth and poverty accompanied the rapid expansion of U.S. cities. Reformer Jacob Riis's photographs starkly portrayed "how the other half lives" to the audiences who attended his lantern-slide shows or saw engraved versions in newspapers. But, as is evident in this photograph of an alley on New York's Lower East Side, Riis often posed and framed his subjects in ways that were meant to arouse not only sympathy but also fear and distaste among viewers. Dr. Henry Piffard or Richard Hoe Lawrence (for Jacob Riis), 1888—Jacob A. Riis Collection, Museum of the City of New York.

pen and ink. The typewriter, combined with the growing demand for clerical labor, transformed the office from an all-male preserve to a hierarchy in which men dictated and women served. By 1890, almost one-third of students in business schools were women, mostly enrolled in stenography and typing courses.

A great wave of immigration also reshaped American society during the late nineteenth century. The largest worldwide population movement in human history brought 10 million immigrants to the United States between 1860 and 1890. In the 1880s alone, 5.25 million people entered, as many as had arrived during the first six decades of the century. They came primarily from Ireland, Germany, and Britain, as they had before the Civil War, but people from all points of the compass now joined them. From Scandinavia, Italy, China, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire came hundreds of thousands of men to work on American farms and railroads and in American factories. Increasingly, in the 1880s and 1890s, immigrants came from eastern and southern Europe.

Immigrants crowded the large cities. By 1880, nearly nine of every ten Chicagoans were first- or second-generation immigrants. These new Americans especially dominated the urban industrial workforce; approximately one of every three industrial workers in the late nineteenth century had immigrated to the United States. As a clergyman observed of Chicago, "Not every foreigner is a workingman, but in the cities, at least, it may almost be said that every workingman is a foreigner."

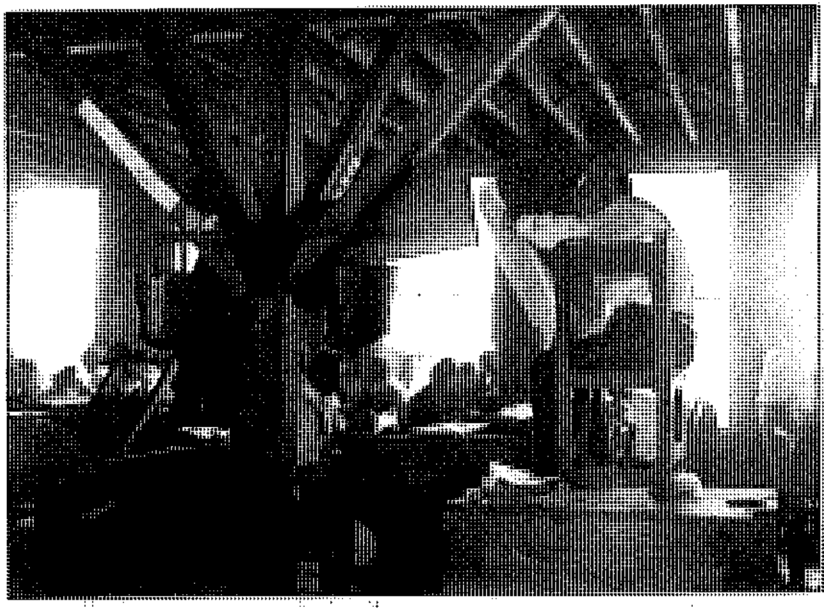
They participated in a global labor market, sensitive to the potential for employment in both their native lands and their adopted one. Matthias Dorgathen, for example, was one of 1,700 miners who journeyed to North America from the Ruhr district of Germany in 1881 when mines there cut wages and laid off workers. Those leaving their homelands adjusted their plans according to the ups and downs of the U.S. business cycle; immigration fell sharply during the American depressions of 1873–1878 and 1882–1885, and it rose during the boom period of the late 1880s. The catalysts for going to America varied from group to group. Rural poverty and political instability sent more than 2 million Chinese in search of better opportunities in Southeast Asia, Peru, Hawaii, and the Caribbean in the second half of the nineteenth century; more than 300,000 came to the United States. Rapid population growth and a major agricultural depression had forced off the land most of the 1.5 million men and women who left Ireland for America between the Civil War and 1890. Emigrants from more developed countries such as Great Britain and Germany fled a long European industrial depression that was triggered in part by competition from the United States.

As American demand for industrial labor soared, railroad and steamship companies sought out this much-needed labor force, advertising the glories of American life throughout Europe and China. But the stories told by friends and family already in America proved more convincing. Pioneering immigrants kept in touch with their Old World families and communities and sponsored those who chose to follow. The success of Francesco Barone, a prosperous Buffalo saloonkeeper, inspired 8,000 people to move from Barone's home village in Sicily to his adopted city; he assisted many of them directly.

These intertwined processes of industrialization, bureaucratization, urbanization, and immigration had begun before the Civil War, but they accelerated sharply in the 1870s and 1880s. The tentacles of urban-industrial life reached far into the countryside, drawing everybody into a market economy that was no longer local or face-to-face. A family who lived in a Nebraska sod hut and ordered a dishpan from a Montgomery Ward catalogue paid for it with money from the sale of their grain. How much they got for the grain depended on decisions made in eastern corporate headquarters and on the weather in other grain-growing areas around the globe.

The Making of an Industrial Working Class A diverse and stratified working class emerged as part of industrial capitalism's post–Civil War growth. Race and ethnicity, skill levels, gender, and age separated working people. Even in the same family, men and women, adults and children encountered very different employment opportunities. Skilled workers made up one-sixth of the workforce. They were typically white men from families that had long been resident in the United States, but some were immigrants and children of immigrants from England, Ireland, and Germany. These skilled, proud, and relatively well-paid craftsmen—the "labor aristocracy"—dominated such trades as carpentry.

Because workers usually secured jobs through family and friends, many trades took on a decidedly ethnic character. The sons of Irish immigrants tended to work as plumbers, carpenters, and bricklayers. Germans controlled furniture making, brewing, and baking. The English, Welsh, and Scots—who had emigrated from the center of the world's first industrial



Cigars and the News
While his fellow workers make cigars, one craftsman reads aloud from a newspaper. This arrangement, in which cigar makers pooled their wages to cover the pay of the designated reader, indicates how some skilled trades maintained pre-industrial customs even as their work became subdivided and mechanized. Lewis Hine, 1909—International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.

revolution—filled the ranks of skilled machinists, metalworkers, and miners.

Skilled workers enjoyed high wages because employers relied on their knowledge and paid a premium for it. Late-nineteenth-century entrepreneurs excelled at amassing the wherewithal to build factories but depended on skilled workers to run them. Craft skills therefore gave workers some measure of power and control over daily conditions on the job.

Late-nineteenth-century skilled workers embraced ideals of craft unity and collective action in the same way that capitalists celebrated individualism and profitability. Some skilled workers unionized, and some joined radical groups to fulfill collective ideals. But no more than one-third of the workers in any nineteenth-century trade belonged to unions, and skilled craftsmen generally stayed away from radical movements. As long as they could earn a good living and keep their employers' respect, most craft workers wanted neither trouble on the job nor social upheaval. Their power rested as much on their skills, knowledge, and workplace relationships as on the strength of their formal organizations or any larger social vision.

Unskilled laborers could not as readily control their working conditions. New immigrants, African Americans, and impoverished women and children of all races and nationalities compelled by financial circumstances to take any available work filled the ranks of the unskilled. African American men did menial labor for wages, serving as gardeners, coach drivers, and doormen; women were confined largely to domestic service. Mexican American men labored on the railroads and in the expanding mining industries of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona; their wives and children worked southwestern farmlands that their ancestors had occupied for generations.

Wages varied directly with an occupational group's power and social status. Men typically received at least 50 percent more than women. White workers commanded wages that were significantly higher than those paid to African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Chinese Americans. Skilled craftsmen earned much more than the unskilled. The best-paid craftsmen (a locomotive engineer or a glassblower, for example) could bring home more than $800 a year in the 1880s, whereas an unskilled textile worker's family had to survive on $350.

Even skilled workers had reason to worry. The proportion of skilled jobs in the labor market was declining as industry mechanized. Oscar

Ameringer, a teenager newly arrived in Cincinnati, brought with him cabinetmaking skills he had learned from his father in Germany. But Ameringer's skills meant little in the furniture factories of the United States. "The work was monotonous, the hours of drudgery ten a day, my wages a dollar," he later wrote. Workers frequently lost time because of injury or illness. And all workers faced the burden of unemployment during the troughs of the business cycle. In 1878, at the end of the five-year depression, well over half a million working people remained unemployed. Employment picked up, but by the mid-1880s, as many as two million were again out of work.

But low wages actually bought more goods over time. While wages remained fairly steady from 1870 until the end of the century, virtually everything became less expensive. The food that cost $1.00 in 1870 sold for just 78 cents a decade later—an enormous benefit to working-class families, who generally spent half their income on food. Thus, "real" wages, adjusted for changes in the cost of living, actually rose slowly. Nevertheless, most unskilled workers remained in poverty during this period, and many families had to send more than one family member out to work. The number of women and children in the labor force more than doubled between 1870 and 1890.

In the 1870s and 1880s, one in every six or seven paid workers was a woman. English-speaking white women could take advantage of two rapidly growing "white-collar" (a reference to the white shirts that were once standard for office workers) occupations: retail selling and office work. But in general, the women who most often worked outside their homes—African American and immigrant women—had the worst economic prospects. Except for African American women, who worked for wages throughout their lives, female workers were almost all young and unmarried. Still, by 1890, a small but growing minority—almost one in every seven female wage earners—was married.

Women's employment outside the home aroused controversy, especially in middle-class families. But even working-class men argued for a "family wage" that would make it possible for women to avoid wage work outside the home. Some wondered whether a woman who worked could be truly respectable. Others contended that women worked just for "pin money," in order "to decorate themselves beyond their needs and station." Employers often used this argument to justify paying women less than men and laying women off first during hard times. Persistent questions about the legitimacy of women's paid work dragged down female workers' earnings. As one Iowa shoe saleswoman complained in 1886, "I don't get the salary the men clerks do, although this day I am six hundred sales ahead! Call this justice? But I have to grin and bear it, because I am so unfortunate as to be a woman."

The Slaves of the Sweaters
A New York immigrant tailor's family returns from a contractor, carrying material to be sewn into garments back home. Scenes of urban poverty, such as this one depicted in an 1890 engraving, were featured in illustrated newspapers. Photography and individual "art" prints, however, tended to celebrate the city, with depopulated images focusing on the "grand style" architecture of new buildings or constructing distant bird's-eye views of ideal urban landscapes. William A. Rogers, *Harper's Weekly*, April 26, 1890—American Social History Project.

Most women who could afford to stay at home did so. Employment was hazardous to women's health: the death rate of women wage-earners was twice that of other women. Many predominantly female occupations, such as domestic service and "home work"—work paid by the piece done in tenement residences—demanded extraordinarily long hours. And some women faced sexual exploitation and abuse by male bosses and coworkers. At best, wage-earning women suffered the same hardships as men—periodic unemployment, long hours, and dangerous conditions—with even lower pay. And in an era of rigid gender roles, women worked a "second shift" at home, performing household labor in homes that were not equipped with running water or electricity.

Children's labor helped to sustain millions of working-class families. During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, about one in six children between the ages of ten and fifteen years held jobs. They toiled for meager wages in textile mills, tobacco-processing plants, and print shops. They roamed the streets as newsboys, bootblacks, and scrap collectors. In southern cotton mills, their year-round workdays lasted twelve hours, and they sometimes worked the night shift. Their lack of schooling meant that they would have few opportunities beyond factory work. A few states (particularly in New England) prohibited child labor and required school attendance, but the laws were loosely enforced and easily ignored by desperate parents and greedy employers.

Although divided by skill, ethnicity, race, gender, and age, working people in the late nineteenth century had much in common. They worked long hours—typically ten-hour days, six days a week. More and more workers also encountered the impersonality of the large factory, the sense of being an anonymous cog in a big wheel. Between 1870 and 1900, the average workforce in cotton mills and tobacco factories doubled.

Many employers sought ways to raise profits by reducing workers' already paltry wages. Some cut wages; others required workers to bear part of the costs associated with their tasks. Clothing manufacturers required employees to buy sewing machines, needles, and thread. Some employers shifted the costs of rent, heat, and light onto the workers by hiring them to manufacture clothing, artificial flowers, and other small items in their

"... Leaves Me in Poor Circumstances": New Production Methods Affect Workers

In his testimony before a U.S. Senate committee investigating conditions of labor and capital in October 1883, Thomas O'Donnell (who had immigrated to the United States from England eleven years earlier) describes the introduction of ring spinning machines to replace mule spinners at the Fall River, Massachusetts, textile factory where he worked. Ring spinners produced thread with a continuous rather than intermittent motion and could achieve higher speeds. These changes allowed the mill's owners to employ children and reduce wages. O'Donnell describes the sharp decline in his family's living standards that followed.

They are doing away with a great deal of mule-spinning there and putting in ring-spinning, and for that reason it takes a good deal of small help to run this ring work, and it throws the men out of work. . . . There are so many men in the city to work, and whoever has a boy can have work, and whoever has no boy stands no chance. Probably he may have a few months of work in the summer time, but will be discharged in the fall. That is what leaves me in poor circumstances. Our children, of course, are very often sickly from one cause or another, on account of not having sufficient clothes, or shoes, or food, or something. . . .

Q. How much [work] have you had within a year?—A. That would be about fifteen weeks' work . . . I got just $1.50 a day. . . .

Q. That would be somewhere about $133 [in annual wages], if you had not lost any time.—A. Yes, sir.

Q. That is all you have had?—A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you mean that yourself and wife and two children have had nothing but that for all this time?—A. That is all. I got a couple dollars' worth of coal last winter, and the wood I picked up myself. I goes around with a shovel and picks up clams and wood.

Q. What do you do with the clams?—A. We eat them. I don't get them to sell, but just to eat, for the family. That is the way my brother lives, too, mostly. He lives close by us.

Q. How many live in that way down there?—A. I could not count them, they are so numerous. I suppose there are one thousand down there.

Q. A thousand that live on $150 a year?—A. They live on less. . . .

Q. How long has that been so?—A. Mostly so since I have been married.

Q. How long is that?—A. Six years this month.

Q. Why do you not go West on a farm?—A. How could I go, walk it?

U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Report on the Relations Between Labor and Capital,* vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 451–457.

tenement apartments. And mining companies and others often paid in "scrip," or company-issued paper money. This money could be used only at company-owned stores, which charged highly inflated prices. One mining company made $1,000 a month by selling gunpowder—needed by miners to extract coal or ore—at $1.25 above the going rate.

Caught in the Shafting
The *National Police Gazette* portrayed, in a characteristically lurid fashion, an industrial accident in a North Grosvenor, Connecticut, cotton mill. The *Police Gazette* enthusiastically violated the mores of a genteel culture by focusing on legal and illegal sports, violent crimes and accidents, and sex. Women were often depicted as perpetrators or victims of violence, providing titillation to the male readership. *National Police Gazette*, May 28, 1892—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Most late-nineteenth-century businessmen ignored hazardous working conditions, largely because they had little financial incentive to make the workplace safer. Railroad workers risked being maimed as they ran along the tops of trains to set the brakes for each car or stood on the tracks to drop a coupling pin as the cars crashed together. In 1881 alone, long after safety devices such as automatic coupler systems and the Westinghouse air brake had become widely available, 30,000 railroad workers were killed or injured on the job. "So long as brakes cost more than trainmen," the prominent minister Lyman Abbott predicted, "we may expect the present sacrificial method of car coupling to continue." The courts repeatedly denied damages to injured workers, maintaining that the workers shared the blame for accidents and that by going to work, they accepted the risks of the job. In 1893, Congress narrowly passed the Railroad Safety Appliance Act, which finally made it illegal for trains to operate without automatic couplers and air brakes. The harsh conditions of the emerging industrial capitalist economy were the price that working people paid for the vast industrial transformation of the United States in these years.

Power and Profit

Businessmen stood at the apex of the new system, and many of them argued that they were destined to lead and control. Yet, paradoxically, they viewed the world below their summit with fear and anxiety. How could they tame the ruinous cycle of boom and bust? How could they gain command of the industrial colossus that, at times, seemed unmanageable? Control became their watchword: control of the markets for their raw materials and their products, control of production within their firms, control of the workers who toiled for them, and control of their political environment. A chaotic economic and political environment ultimately crushed their fantasies of total control, but they did attain an unprecedented degree of power and money.

Businessmen Justify Their Rule and Seek Control In the late nineteenth century, many people worshiped at the altar of capitalist success: "That you have property is proof of industry and foresight on your part or your father's," one writer asserted, "that you have nothing is a judgment on your laziness and vices, or on your improvidence." Businessmen, politicians, and scholars even attempted to explain capitalist social relations by citing the theory of biological evolution proposed by British scientist Charles Darwin in 1859. According to Darwin, a process of natural selection determines the most adaptable or "fittest" members of a plant or animal species, those best able to survive and reproduce. Social Darwinists distorted this theory to explain "scientifically" the impoverishment of the "unfit" masses and warned that interference on behalf of the "weak" would doom American society. John D. Rockefeller justified brutal economic competition as "a survival of the fittest, the working out of a law of nature and a law of God."

This ideology of Social Darwinism both justified and grew out of the ruthless behavior of business leaders, especially in the railroad industry. In the 1870s, railroad owners and executives organized themselves into cartels (price-fixing rings) that divided up traffic and set freight rates, an approach that seemed preferable to cutthroat competition. But the cartels collapsed when railroad executives slashed freight rates to win customers in hard times. When a cartel member broke ranks, rivals had no recourse but to follow suit; their agreements were not enforceable legal contracts.

A new breed of financial speculators—men who had little interest in running railroads but great interest in profiting from them—also undermined the railroad managers. Financiers led by Jay Gould, Jim Fisk, and Cornelius Vanderbilt rigged the stock market, issuing thousands of shares of new, "watered" stock without increasing the assets they represented. They also launched rate wars to drive down the price of railroad stocks and bonds temporarily so that they could buy distressed railroads at bargain prices.

When the cartels collapsed in the 1880s, railroad managers turned to a simpler method of controlling competition: building huge rail networks to drive smaller lines out of business. Between 1880 and 1893, the big railroads leased more land, bought more equipment, and laid more track, enormously increasing the scale of their operations. Constructed from inferior materials and laid along badly prepared routes, much of this new track had to be rebuilt, at significant expense, within fifteen years.

Large-scale manufacturing enterprises experienced similar boom-and-bust patterns of expansion, competition, and bankruptcy. Industrialists rushed into new markets, overbuilding capacity until initially high prices and profits gave way to sharp competition, falling prices, and declining profits. Like the railroads, manufacturers used size as a competitive weapon. Some grew through horizontal integration, in which several companies producing the same product merged to form a single larger unit that could gain control of prices and markets. Other manufacturers focused on vertical integration, in which one firm coordinated all aspects of production and distribution, rather than buying materials from and selling products to other companies. This strategy insulated firms from competition by enabling them to control their costs of manufacturing. Still others focused on acquiring new technology. By installing a new production process, a firm might cut expenses, lower prices, drive competitors out of business, and then raise prices again.

The most successful firms combined these approaches, as demonstrated by the activities of the two leading industrialists of the period: John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie. Rockefeller, the son of an itinerant patent-medicine salesman, started as a bookkeeper, earning enough to become a partner in a successful wholesaling firm. In 1863, he invested his money in the fledgling petroleum industry, which primarily produced kerosene for lighting.

Seven years later, Rockefeller and his partners incorporated Standard Oil, a centrally organized combination of oil corporations. Thanks to its close ties with the railroads, which granted discounts or rebates to major shippers, Standard Oil could price its products much lower than those of its competitors and drive them out of business. Dismissing cartels as "ropes of sand," Rockefeller merged competing firms with Standard Oil, pledging willing competitors to secrecy and ruthlessly coercing the unwilling. By 1880, the Standard Oil Trust controlled about 90 percent of the nation's oil-refining capacity; Rockefeller could set the price and virtually control the output of oil. During the next decade, Standard Oil integrated vertically as well, purchasing oil fields, constructing pipelines, establishing a nationwide system of licensed dealers, and building fleets of tankers to serve newly created foreign marketing subsidiaries.

Andrew Carnegie—the wealthiest American capitalist of the period—was an even more potent symbol of individual advancement, although his rags-to-riches rise was actually quite unusual for his day. Carnegie's Scottish father, a linen weaver, lost his job when the power loom was introduced and moved his family to the United States. He and his wife eked out a living in an immigrant neighborhood in Pittsburgh, weaving and taking in laundry. Young Andrew began his working life in factories but eventually became a telegrapher and personal secretary for Thomas A. Scott, the superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Western Division. When Scott moved up in 1859, Carnegie, at age twenty-four, won Scott's job.

Six years later, Carnegie left the railroad to focus on steel production. He spent the next quarter-century using new technology and techniques of vertical and horizontal integration to ensure his absolute domination over that industry. He built up-to-date mills, acquired companies from competitors, forged alliances with the railroads that both used and hauled his steel, and adapted the management and marketing techniques he had learned at the Pennsylvania Railroad.

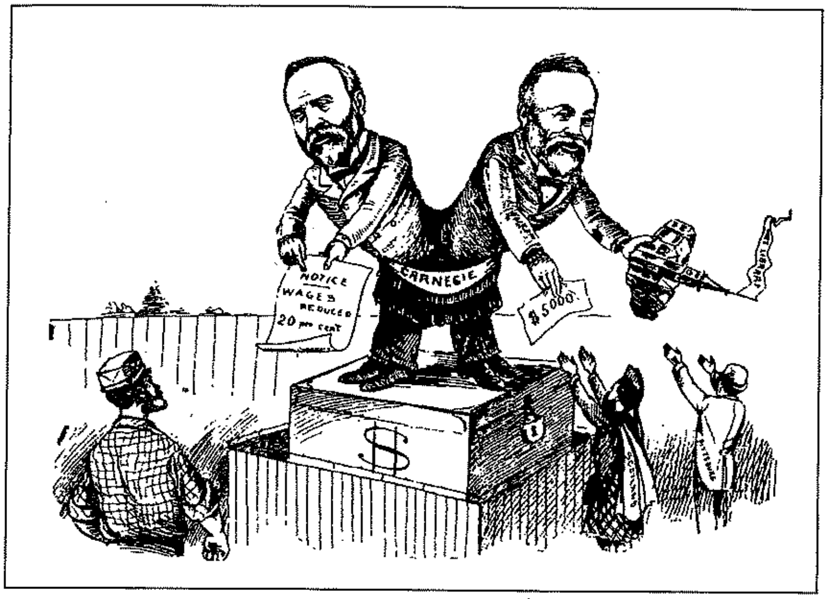
Carnegie carried the techniques of vertical integration further than any of his contemporaries. Annoyed by fluctuations in the price and supply of the pig iron that was basic to steelmaking, he began to produce his own supplies. With his partner Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie acquired sources of iron ore, coke, and coal; expanded his iron-making operations; and developed a fleet of steamships and a railroad to transport materials directly to his steel mills. "From the moment these crude stuffs were dug out of the earth until they flowed in a stream of liquid steel in the ladles," trumpeted one admiring observer, "there was never a price, profit, or royalty paid to an outsider."

New Management Systems Not every late-nineteenth-century businessman tried to dominate his industry as Carnegie and Rockefeller did, but virtually all relentlessly trimmed costs by restructuring their firms and streamlining work processes. Managers of small and large firms alike faced internal and external imperatives to minimize waste and inefficiency. But smaller companies responded more cautiously to the management innovations and production methods that were sweeping corporate America. Most woodworking and metalworking firms, for example, employed fewer than one hundred employees, who turned out relatively small batches of customized products. Such companies opted for limited measures to increase workers' productivity, enhance management control, and increase profits. They might purchase a single new machine, identify a new local or regional market for their products, or modestly (rather than completely) reorganize the work process.

The leaders of gigantic industrial firms, on the other hand, chose a wholly new form of corporate direction. After 1880, big businessmen turned to systematic management, a loose label for various efforts to speed and streamline industrial operations. Initially, unsystematic and decentralized labor-control systems handicapped them. In most nineteenth-century factories, a foreman responsible for achieving production goals supervised each department. But he often had to cajole workers to get the job done or even negotiate with them over output, pay, and other issues. Industrial workers resisted working ceaselessly at peak efficiency, trying instead to set their own pace and give the boss what they considered a fair day of work. Manufacturers complained bitterly about time wasted by workers who stopped to rest, discuss the progress of the work, or wait for machines to be repaired or materials to be delivered.

To increase workers' output, employers began to enforce formal work rules more strictly. A New Hampshire factory headed its list of work rules with "NOTICE! TIME IS MONEY!" One rule stated that washing up "must be done outside of working hours, and not at our expense."

Some manufacturers introduced machinery as part of their campaign to exert control over employees. Fuming at his workers' victory in an 1885 strike, Cyrus McCormick of Chicago's McCormick Harvesting Machine Company vowed, "I do not think we will be troubled by the same thing



Forty-millionaire Carnegie in His Great Double Role
In 1892, this unidentified cartoonist, along with many Americans, sharply criticized the steel baron for his role in the Homestead strike. Andrew Carnegie's "Great Double Role" refers to his accumulation of an immense personal fortune at the same time as he endowed cultural institutions around the world. "[A]s the tight-fisted employer," ran the caption, "he reduced wages that he may play philanthropist and give away libraries, etc." Utica, New York, *Saturday Globe*, July 9, 1892—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

again if we take proper steps to weed out the bad element among the men." McCormick installed $500,000 worth of molding machinery so that he could "weed out" the skilled workers who had led the strike, crush their union, and replace them with low-paid, unskilled workers. Similarly, John D. Rockefeller used new barrel-making technology in his Cleveland plant to break the power—and lower the wages—of the company's highly skilled and once-proud barrel makers.

Andrew Carnegie combined bold technological innovation and ruthless employee management to gain control over the work process. For example, he designed his J. Edgar Thompson steelworks in Braddock, Pennsylvania, with elevated trains to carry coal overhead throughout the huge mill, thereby eliminating the jobs of hundreds of shovel-wielding laborers. Resisting an 1892 strike by workers at his giant plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania, Carnegie managed to lengthen the working day in all of his plants without raising the daily wage rate. In the mid-1890s, many of his employees worked twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week. "We stop only the time it takes to oil the engines," said one Homestead worker.

Businessmen Look to Politics Businessmen saw politics as another means of boosting profits and consolidating their control of markets and workers. Business influence pervaded all levels of government in the late nineteenth century, but as enterprises became national in scope, their owners and managers tried to shape the federal government and nationwide policies. Managers much preferred to deal with a uniform set of federal laws or regulations than with a confusing and contradictory assortment of state and local ones. Big businessmen also found that they could influence the federal government more easily than state or local governments, which tended to respond more to local interests. And as journalists and reformers began demanding that the national government regulate railroads and control monopolies, businessmen sought to influence legislation in their own behalf.

Corruption and favor buying in government had increased notably during the Civil War, and they persisted when peace came. Widespread vote selling led one Ohio politician to call the House of Representatives in 1873 "an auction room." Politicians still embraced "the spoils system" (a term dating back to the 1830s), in which supporters of the winning party received

"... The Duty of the Man of Wealth": Two Perspectives on Men of Wealth

In The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays, *published in 1889, the industrialist Andrew Carnegie argued that individual capitalists were duty bound to play a broader cultural and social role and thus improve the world. Not everyone viewed Carnegie as the benevolent philanthropist he presented himself to be. His antiunion stance and efforts to get maximum work for the least pay placed him in another light for workers. A "Workman" published a satirical response to Carnegie's book in an 1894 issue of a Pittsburgh labor newspaper.*

Excerpt from Carnegie's *The Gospel of Wealth:*

This then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth: To set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which came to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community—the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves....

A Workman's Prayer:

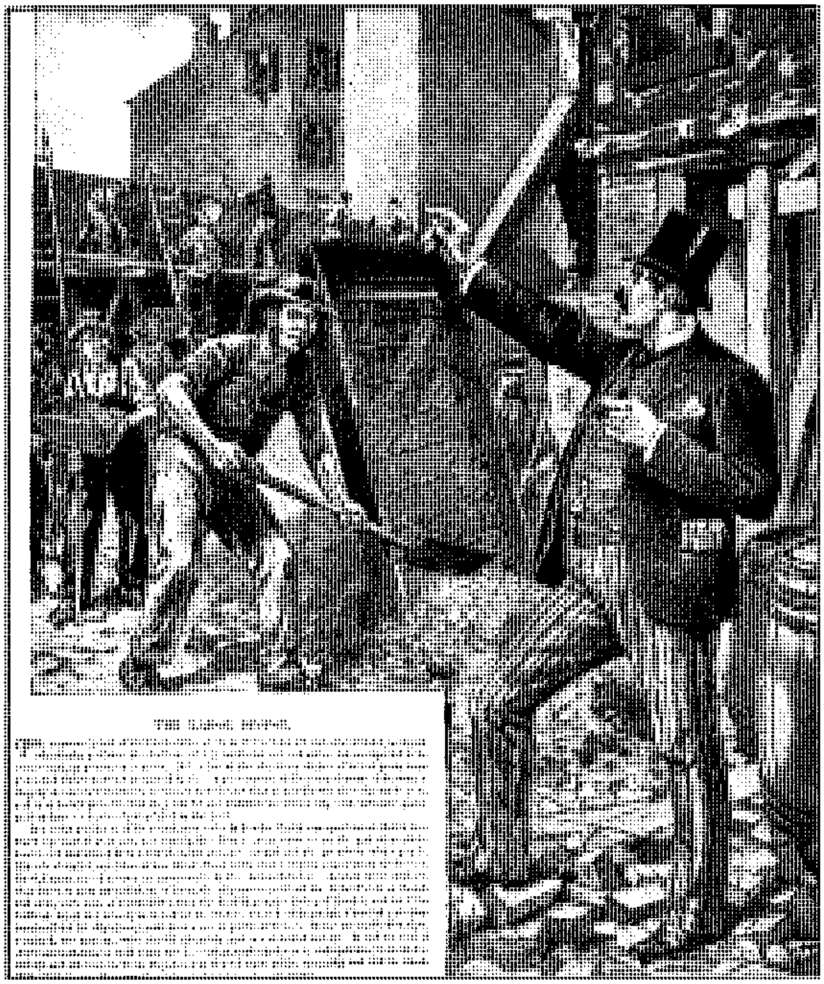
Oh, almighty Andrew Philanthropist Library Carnegie, who art in America when not in Europe spending the money of your slaves and serfs, thou art a good father to the people of Pittsburgh, Homestead and Beaver Falls. We bow before thee in humble obedience of slavery.... We have no desire but to serve thee. If you sayest black was white we believe you, and are willing, with the assistance of ... the Pinkerton's agency, to knock the stuffin[g] out of anyone who thinks different, or to shoot down and imprison serfs who dare say you have been unjust in reducing the wages of your slaves, who call themselves citizens of the land of the free and the home of the brave....

Oh, lord and master, we love thee because you and other great masters of slaves favor combines and trusts to enslave and make paupers of us all. We love thee though our children are clothed in rags. We love thee though our wives ... are so scantily dressed and look so shabby. But, oh master, thou hast given us one great enjoyment which man has never dreamed of before—a free church organ, so that we can take our shabby families to church to hear your great organ pour forth its melodious strains....

Oh, master, we thank thee for all the free gifts you have given the public at the expense of your slaves.... Oh, master, we need no protection, we need no liberty so long as we are under thy care. So we commend ourselves to thy mercy and forevermore sing thy praise.

Amen!

Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (1889); "A Workingman's Prayer," *The Coming Nation*, February 10, 1894.



The Tyranny of the Walking Delegate

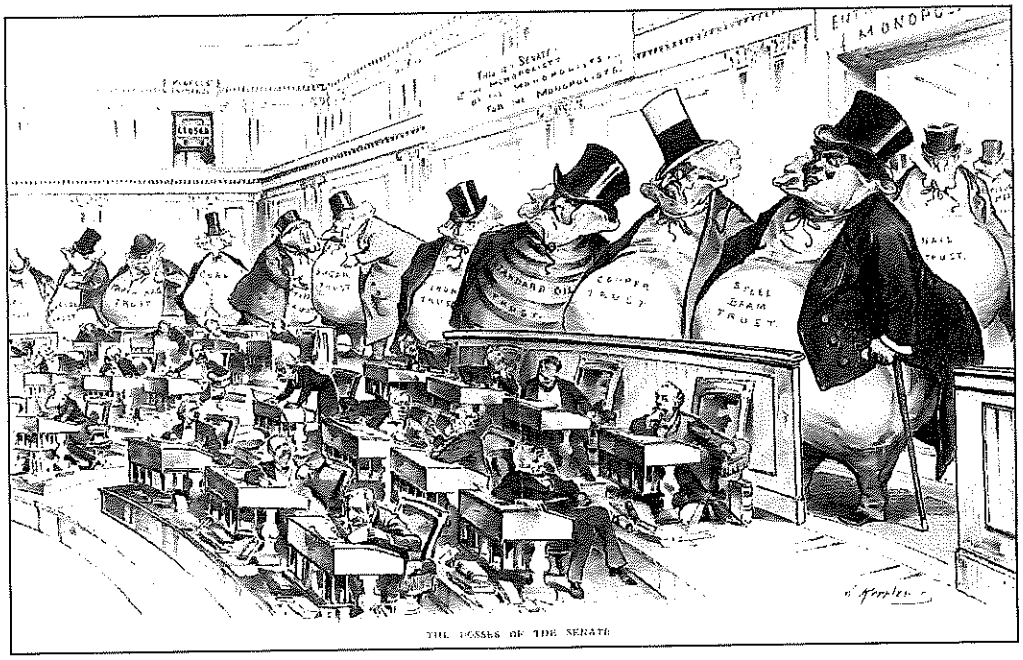
The popular image of the trade union official changed as manufacturers attempted to exert greater control over the workplace. In this 1889 engraving, a trade union officer — "the well-fed, well-paid official . . . whose fiat is expected to be obeyed without protest or murmur" — arbitrarily calls a strike. Portrayed as a despotic opponent of business, the official's manner and dress resembled those of the familiar figure of the corrupt political boss. J. Durkin, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, September 21, 1889 — American Social History Project.

government offices and they in turn paid off the party.

Beginning in 1875, Democrats increasingly challenged Republican dominance in Washington, D.C., as they rebuilt their party from the shambles of the war. The revived Democratic Party united most of the South, and it attracted a growing number of workingmen in northern industrial areas by attacking the increasing concentration of wealth and corruption in politics. In the Compromise of 1877, the Democrats made a deal that gave the presidency to Rutherford B. Hayes but, in return, secured the removal of federal troops from the southern states and African Americans from national and local politics (see the Prologue).

The Compromise of 1877 fed growing disillusionment with political corruption. Against this background, a campaign to clean up politics emerged in the late 1870s and gained momentum in the early 1880s. Some reformers had long advocated replacing the spoils system with a civil service system based on merit and protected against shifts in party power; England, Germany, and other European countries had already embraced such systems. That idea acquired new urgency in the United States in 1881, when Charles Guiteau, a crazed job seeker and member of an opposing faction of Republicans (called the "Stalwarts") assassinated Republican President James A. Garfield. When Guiteau shot Garfield, he announced the succession to a Stalwart supporter: "I am a Stalwart. [Vice President Chester] Arthur is now president." (Actually, Guiteau spoke too soon; Garfield languished for almost three months on his deathbed. In this era when the president and the federal government were much less central to national life, an incapacitated president did not pose a major problem.) Two years later, the Pendleton Civil Service Act created the Civil Service Commission to hire federal workers on the basis of competitive examinations.

Still, politics remained a dirty business. In the particularly grubby 1884 election, Democrats described the Republican candidate, Senator James G. Blaine, as "the continental liar from the State of Maine" to highlight the



The Bosses of the Senate

An 1889 cartoon from the satirical weekly *Puck* decries corporate control of the U.S. Senate. "This is a Senate of the Monopolists, by the Monopolists, and for the Monopolists!" reads the sign over the corpulent corporate spectators as they watch over the obedient legislators (many of whom were millionaires). Meanwhile, the "People's Entrance" to the Senate is barred shut. Joseph Keppler, *Puck*, January 23, 1889—New-York Historical Society.

personal honesty of the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland. But Cleveland, the governor of New York, had two skeletons in his own closet. He had hired a substitute to fight for him in the Civil War, as had many better-off northerners, but it was hardly a wise move in retrospect. He had also fathered a child out of wedlock. But Blaine lost ground with Irish Catholic voters after a Protestant minister attacked the Democrats as the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion," and he offended working-class voters by attending a well-publicized sumptuous feast hosted by Jay Gould and other robber barons in the midst of a depression. Cleveland won narrowly; a shift of six hundred votes in the crucial state of New York would have made Blaine president. The close contest reflected the even balance between the parties in this period. In 1888, Cleveland lost narrowly in electoral votes to Benjamin Harrison, though he had won the popular vote. (Four years later, however, Cleveland won a resounding victory and became the only person to serve two nonconsecutive terms as president.)

Aiding Harrison in 1888 was a lavish campaign chest that department store magnate John Wanamaker systemati-

Another Voice for Cleveland

Grover Cleveland's reputation for honesty was undermined when it was revealed that the candidate had fathered a child out of wedlock. This cartoon, published during the 1884 campaign, poked fun at Cleveland's situation. Frank Beard, *Judge*, September 27, 1884—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

cally raised from businessmen—the first time that truly large sums of money had been raised from businessmen for a presidential campaign. Ironically, the 1883 Pendleton Civil Service Act had freed political parties from financial dependence on their appointees (who had often provided kickbacks and contributions) only to place them at the mercy of businessmen, who became the alternative source of funds. Industrialists' and financiers' contributions to both the Democratic and Republican parties assured them of support from whichever was in power. As a result, journalist William Allen White argued that senators represented not political but economic entities: "Coal and iron owned a coterie from the Middle and Eastern seaport states. Cotton had half a dozen senators. And so it went."

When popular sentiment demanded that the government regulate business by reining in railroads or curbing monopolies, business-oriented members of Congress could ensure that the resulting laws lacked muscle. Thus, businessmen used their influence to shape the two great measures of federal regulation of business during the late nineteenth century: the Interstate Commerce Act (1887) and the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890). Powerful railroads made the Interstate Commerce Commission—the regulatory agency set up under the 1887 act—their servant instead of their master.

The judiciary provided an even more reliable bulwark of business power in federal circles. Most federal judges began their careers in corporation law, and they served their former business associates from the bench. Court decisions further weakened the already feeble federal laws regulating business. The courts rarely found corporations guilty of violating the Sherman Antitrust Act; instead, they used it to curb labor unions by issuing injunctions—cease-and-desist orders—against strikers and their unions.

The South and West Industrialize

The tentacles of the industrial capitalist goliath gripped not just the railroads and factories of the Northeast and Midwest. It also transformed—albeit less evenly and completely—life in the South, which remained heavily agricultural, and the West, which relied on agriculture and extractive industries. In the post–Civil War era, industrialization—generally under the auspices of northern capitalists—appeared in southern textile factories and coal mines. Meanwhile, railroads brought farmers, even in the remote hill country, under the sway of national and international markets. In the West, capitalist enterprise—manifest in everything from the hard rock mines to the vast corporate ranching spreads to the inevitable railroads—had an even rougher and more brutal edge than in the East. But, as in the East, working people and immigrants (often from Asia or Mexico) generally bore the heaviest brunt of the transforming power of the new profit-driven economy. But so did much longer-standing residents of the land—the

Native Americans—and the land itself, which overgrazing and farming scarred.

The New South The Compromise of 1877 cemented the rule of southern conservatives and made the region "safe" for northern business, a condition that had not existed during the social and political upheavals of Reconstruction. Consequently, when the depression of the 1870s lifted, northern businessmen began to invest large amounts of money in the South. Men such as Henry Grady, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, envisioned a "New South" filled with cities, immigrants, commerce, and industry financed by northern money, and they courted northern industrial capital. But the New South developed slowly and erratically, because southern dependence on cotton, the domination of northern capital, and the legacy of slavery shaped and sometimes hobbled the growth of industrial capitalism. This meant that the small farmers, black and white, who constituted the vast majority of the southern population, faced even greater insecurity and suffering than did northern workers.

Northern business had easily gained control of southern industry and finance after the Civil War. Emancipation had wiped out the Southern capital invested in slaves. The war's physical destruction caused further losses. Federal action during Reconstruction reinforced the region's dependency. The nation's new financial system tilted toward promoting industry and favored creditors, which did little for the agricultural South, dominated by debtors. Republican banking and currency legislation encouraged northern industry but hampered the operations of southern banks that had not failed outright.

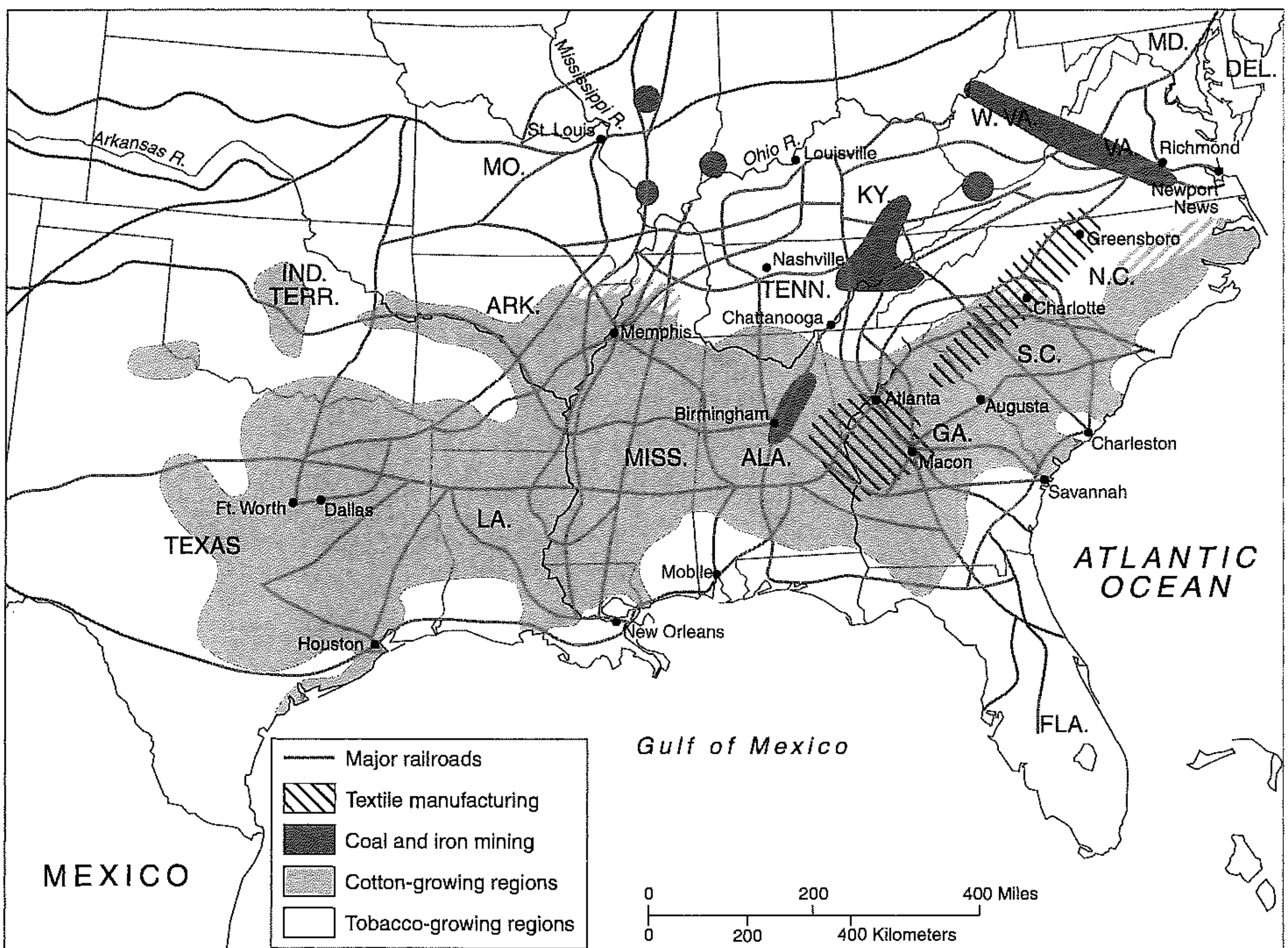
Northern (and to some extent European) investors, who placed their own profits before southern welfare, bankrolled Southern industrial development. They set up low-wage operations to extract raw materials or crudely processed products, such as lumber, coal, cotton, turpentine, and seafood. These industries squeezed profits from the region, depleted resources, and left behind destitute people and a dependent economy. The only major southern-controlled industry was tobacco, which was dominated by North Carolinians such as James B. Duke, who mechanized the industry.

Railroads led the way in southern economic development, as they had in the North. Between 1880 and 1890, laborers laid over 22,000 miles of track, nearly doubling the southern rail network. Twelve large corporations, most of them headquartered in New York City, controlled half of all southern tracks. Aided by state legislators, who provided generous land grants and lenient tax policies to speculators, the railroads helped to develop industries such as the iron industry in Tennessee, Virginia, and Alabama that extracted resources. Birmingham, Alabama, which did not even exist in 1870, became one of the country's largest iron-, steel-, and coal-producing centers by 1900. But such industrialization required northern capital and technical expertise; the South's dependent position circumscribed its ability to act on its own.

The most important southern industry—in fact, the key to southern industrialization—was cotton manufacturing (Map 1.2). Between 1880 and 1890, the number of spindles (rods holding spools of thread) increased ninefold in the four leading textile states (Georgia, Alabama, and the Carolinas), to just under four million. The new southern mills had two unbeatable advantages over their older northern counterparts: the newest, most efficient technology and impoverished and poorly paid workers. White women made up more than half of the mill labor force; black women were almost entirely excluded, and black men were confined to heavy labor outside the main areas of the mill. Southern mills also relied heavily on child labor. In 1896, one in four North Carolina cotton mill workers was a child, compared with one in twenty in Massachusetts. A North Carolina child earned less than four cents for every dime a Massachusetts child earned.

MAP 1.2 The New South at the End of the Nineteenth Century

Despite the promises of its boosters, the New South, like the Old South, remained overwhelmingly agricultural. Still, some industries—wood products, coal, cigarettes, and even iron and steel—had emerged by the end of the century. The most important was textile manufacturing, which spread through the Piedmont, the region of rolling hills that stretched from central Virginia down to Georgia and Alabama.



Southern textile workers lived in company towns, where working-class desires for independence and autonomy faced the autocratic and paternalist rule of the corporations. Describing isolated Georgia mill towns in 1891, social investigator Clare de Graffenreid painted a grim picture of "rows of loosely built, weather-stained frame houses" containing only "a shackling bed, tricked out in gaudy patchwork, a few defunct 'split-bottom' chairs, a rickety table, and a jumble of battered crockery." Mill owners, like slave owners before the Civil War, thought of themselves as kindly father figures, but they ruled their company-owned towns with iron fists, refusing to allow them to incorporate and establish local governments. Starvation wages, payment in scrip, and price-gouging company stores eclipsed the advantages of low rent and subsidized schools and churches.

African American Tobacco Workers

In this Richmond, Virginia, factory, women stripped tobacco stems from leaves. As in most southern industries, black workers labored separately from white workers and were relegated to the lowest-paying and least-skilled jobs. Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

In dramatic contrast to the mostly immigrant workforce of the North, whites born in United States dominated the southern textile mill labor force. Race provided southern employers with a powerful weapon for dividing and controlling workers; white workers tolerated exploitation more willingly if they felt superior to black workers. Women in an Atlanta mill showed their determination to protect textile work as a white "privilege" in 1898, when 1,400 of them struck against the employment of two African American spinners. This pattern of race discrimination was not confined to the textile industry. Cigarette factories hired both black and white workers but separated them.

Even though relatively few foreigners immigrated to the South, immigrants composed a disproportionate part of the urban working class. In 1880, immigrants made up only one in twenty residents of Richmond, Virginia, but one in three of the city's unskilled white laborers.

Outside the cities, southerners employed in factories retained their ties to the soil. In Chatham County, Georgia, black men often stayed on the farms all winter while the women worked in a nearby oyster-processing plant. In Tennessee and Virginia, men of both races toiled in sawmills or coal mines while women worked the farms. Many of the South's major employers—tobacco, seafood, and sugar processors—offered only seasonal employment. In the off-season, their employees returned to farming.

Crop Liens, Debt, and Sharecropping For Atlanta's Henry Grady, the railroad symbolized the New South, but for many poor white farmers, it stood for exploitation and greed. This was especially true in the hills of the Appalachians, where most white families had never owned slaves and poor farmers had produced food for their own consumption or for trade with local artisans. After the war, these farmers shifted from subsistence agriculture to commercial production, but they paid dearly to get their goods to market. With no competition, hill-country railroad owners could raise rates, even as freight rates elsewhere declined. As railroad lines extended throughout the southern backcountry, farmers were at their mercy.

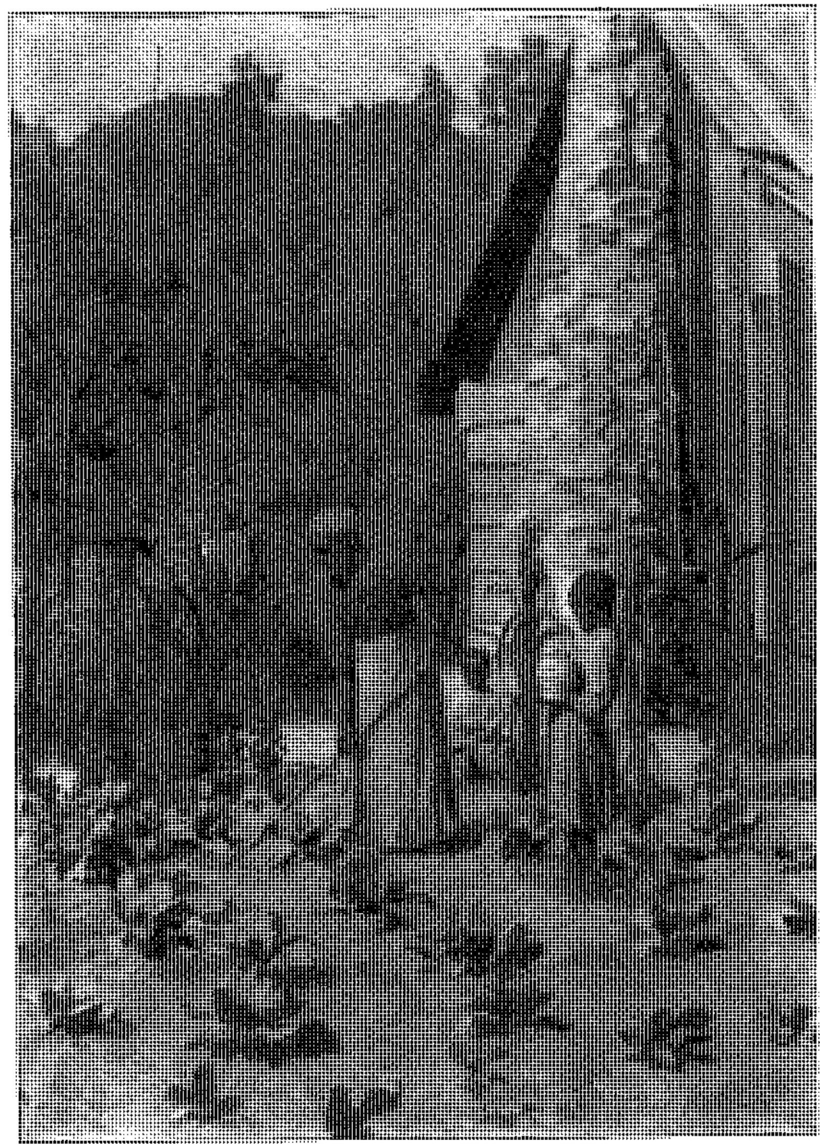
The crop-lien system exacerbated white farmers' troubles. Cash-poor farmers turned for credit to "furnishing merchants," who used funds borrowed from northern banks to buy seed, tools, and other supplies, which they resold to the farmers in exchange for a lien, or claim, on their next harvest. The merchants not only charged credit customers significantly higher prices than those paid by cash customers, but also added 25 to 50 percent in interest.

Merchants usually insisted that borrowers grow cotton because it was readily marketable. Unfortunately, the widespread shift to commercial agriculture coincided with the beginning of a long-term decline in world prices for cotton. A dramatic increase in Brazilian, Egyptian, and Indian cotton production and — more significantly — a leveling off of international demand for cotton led to a ruinous fall in prices. The record-breaking 1894 cotton crop was more than double that of 1873, but farmers suffered because 1894 prices were only one-third of those paid two decades earlier.

Consequently, white small farmers found themselves trapped in a vicious circle: they could get credit only if they grew cotton; cotton prices kept falling, so they had to plant more; the more cotton they planted, the less food they grew; the less food they grew, the more they had to borrow to buy food. More and more often, their debt surpassed the value of their crops. They had no choice but to commit the following year's crop to the merchants as well. "The furnishing man was the boss, pure and simple," wrote a woman who watched the system work in Alabama. "His word was law." In the end, many white farmers lost their land to these merchants.

On the lowest rung of the southern economic ladder were the tenant farmers, or sharecroppers. In large plantation areas across the South, families — most of them African American — rented small plots of land and paid landowners a large share of the crop at the end of the harvest. While sharecroppers maintained control of their labor and time, the landowners retained the ultimate power of ownership, supplying tools, fertilizer, seed, and land and appropriating most of the crop. Sharecroppers were legally free but economically dependent, drawn into the market system like northern wage laborers. Although they raised crops for the market, African American sharecroppers remained largely outside the cash economy. Each family began the agricultural cycle by securing seed, supplies, and food from the landowner; these items were charged to the family and deducted from its share of the crop at harvest time. Even in the best of times, the family's share was small, but as the price of cotton fell in the 1880s and 1890s, sharecroppers spiraled deeper into debt and dependency. And, although legally free, some sharecroppers lived with the ghosts of slavery. Many white planters still maintained a system of armed "riders" who monitored and disciplined black workers; one woman told of being whipped until her "back was as raw as a piece of raw beef."

Black families scrambled to make a bit of money because every penny earned brought a degree of freedom from dependence on the landowner. Men worked by the day on nearby farms, and women sold chickens, eggs, milk, cheese, and vegetables and did domestic labor. Sharecropper Brown Cobb used his considerable skill as a basket maker to win some concessions from conniving landlords. Still, their poverty was remarkable even in this generally poor region; most black sharecropping women kept house with only a straw broom, a laundry tub, a cooking kettle, and a water pail.



The Way They Live

While many white artists dabbled in romantic visions of the rural South, Thomas Anshutz's 1879 painting captured the hardship of subsistence farming in the post-Reconstruction South. Thomas P. Anshutz, 1879, oil on canvas, 24 × 17 inches — Metropolitan Museum of Art, Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1940 (40.40).

Sharecropping or one of its variants occupied the overwhelming majority of black farming families in the late-nineteenth-century South. Since 90 percent of African Americans still lived in the South and 80 percent of them lived in rural areas, the system touched most of them. Sharecroppers had much in common with the poorest white southerners. Both tilled the cotton fields laboriously by hand, using simple plows and heavy iron hoes. The yoke of debt bore heavily on both. Black or white, poor southern farmers found themselves trapped in a common system, though one divided by race and racism, that made economic independence ever more remote. Even the poorest whites considered themselves superior to blacks, preventing cooperation between the two groups.

"All Must Work Under My Direction": A Sharecropper's Contract

This 1882 contract spells out the terms and conditions under which African American tenant farmers could work small plots of land on the Grimes plantation in Pitt County, North Carolina. Although not a return to conditions of slavery, the contract gives the plantation owner extraordinary control over the conditions of field work and the division of the harvested crop. Sharecroppers were forbidden to keep any cotton seed from the harvest, which would have allowed them to plant their own crop without needing it to be furnished by the plantation owner. Owners could also forbid sharecroppers and their families to work off the plantation, require sharecropping women to work as domestic servants, and physically punish sharecroppers who broke the rules.

To every one applying to rent land upon shares, the following conditions must be read and agreed to.

To every 30 or 35 acres, I agree to furnish the team, plow, and farming implements, except cotton planters, and I do not agree to furnish a cart to every cropper. The croppers are to have half of the cotton, corn and fodder (and peas and pumpkins and potatoes if any are planted) if the following conditions are complied with, but—if not—they are to have only two-fifths. Croppers are to have no part or interest in the cotton seed raised from the crop planted and worked by them. No vine crops of any description, that is no watermelons . . . squashes or anything of that kind . . . are to be planted in the cotton or corn. All must work under my direction. All plantation work to be done by the croppers. . . .

All croppers must clean out stables and fill them with straw, and haul straw in front of stables whenever I direct. All the cotton must be manured, and enough fertilizer must be brought to manure each crop highly, the croppers to pay for one half of all manure bought, the quantity to be purchased for each crop must be left to me.

No cropper to work off the plantation when there is any work to be done on the land he has rented, or when his work is needed by me or other croppers. . . .

Every cropper must be responsible for all gear and farming implements placed in his hands, and if not returned must be paid for unless it is worn out by use.

Croppers must sow and plow in oats and haul them to the crib, but must have no part of them. Nothing to be sold from their crops, nor fodder, nor corn to be carried out of the fields until my rent is all paid, and all amounts they owe me and for which I am responsible are paid in full. . . .

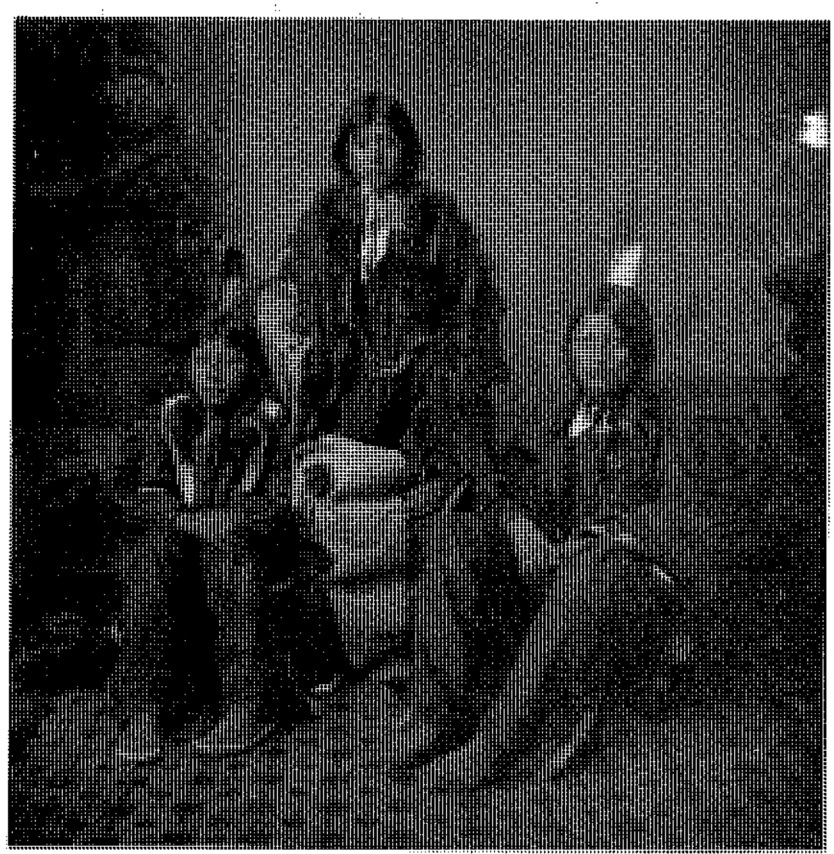
The sale of every cropper's part of the cotton to be made by me when and where I choose to sell, and after deducting all they may owe me and all sums that I may be responsible for on their accounts, to pay them their half of the net proceeds. Work of every description, particularly the work on fences and ditches, to be done to my satisfaction, and must be done over until I am satisfied that it is done as it should be. . . .

Grimes Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Conflict on the Plains In the decades after 1870, the workforce was shifting from agriculture to industry at the same time that the number of farms doubled and farmers brought more land under cultivation than in the previous two and a half centuries. The explanation of the seeming contradiction was that agriculture was also industrializing, and fewer workers could produce more food with the help of machinery, irrigation, and drought-resistant grains. The most rapid development occurred on the level, treeless, semiarid Great Plains (Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and surrounding areas), once dubbed the Great American Desert and written off as unsuitable for farming. Prairie and grassland were easier to bring into production than were forests, which had to be cleared, and the Plains became the heartland of American farming in little more than a generation. White agricultural settlement also extended, although at a slower pace, into California, Nevada, and the huge expanse of land that would become Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Until the late 1870s, American Indians had for 250 years so effectively hindered white settlement in the West that white Americans spoke of the "Indian barrier." That barrier was breached when U.S. soldiers responded to the massive Sioux rebellion of 1876. Lakota leaders refused to be restricted to a reservation and defeated U.S. troops led by General Custer in the Battle of Little Big Horn. In response, thousands of U.S. troops flooded the region, suppressed the warriors, and then murdered the Sioux leader, Crazy Horse, after he surrendered in 1877. Although few great battles would follow, Army patrols, starvation, disease, and alcohol would continue to take their toll, devastating the Indians' traditional ways of life.

White settlers and officials and Plains Indians viewed land ownership very differently. Indians on the Plains hunted over a wide range. Tribes, not individuals, owned the land, and all members shared its fruits. The individualistic ways of white settlers mystified these early Americans; as Sitting Bull of the Sioux remarked, "The white man knows how to make everything, but he does not know how to distribute it." The tradition of communal landholding similarly offended white men, who wanted to carve up the West into private pre-



Arriving at the Carlisle Indian School, c. 1879

Federal policy to "Americanize" and assimilate Indians took place off the reservation as well as on the new reservations. Reformers promoted boarding schools to remove Indian youths from their home environments and culture and instill into them white Protestant values. Army officer Richard Henry Pratt modeled the United States Indian Training and Industrial School, founded on an abandoned military base in 1879 in Pennsylvania, after the Hampton Institute, a government boarding school for African American children in Virginia. Carlisle's first students were a group of eighty-four Lakota children, including these three boys. John N. Choate, Negative Collections, Photo Lot 81-12, #125—National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Beginning the Deculturalization Process

Richard Henry Pratt's philosophy was "to kill the Indian and save the man." Boys were taught certain skilled trades or modern agricultural techniques; girls learned sewing, cooking, laundry, and housework. The English language was considered key to the "civilizing" process, and Indian languages were forbidden. As this "after" photograph of the three Lakota boys illustrates, traditional dress was replaced by military uniforms. Their hair was also cut, which in Lakota society was a symbol of mourning, therefore causing them much distress. Twenty-four more schools modeled on Carlisle were established outside reservations over the next two decades. John N. Choate, Negative Collections, Photo Lot 81-12, #57, 490—National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

serves. Even those who saw themselves as humanitarians regarded individualism and private property as the highest expressions of human civilization.

These views, backed by federal power, became part of federal reservation policy, a contradictory strategy that was designed to segregate Indians, supposedly to prepare them for future integration. Supporters of the policy claimed that reservations would enforce separation, prevent conflict, and protect Indians from white people who refused to acknowledge Indian rights to the land. It did none of these things. Conflict continued as white settlers and Indians fought over land in some places, over livestock in others. Indians shunned reservations across the West. In eastern Oregon, a band of Nez Percé resisted their eviction from nonreservation lands in 1877. The U.S. Army responded by chasing 200 Nez Percé warriors and their families for 1,700 miles through Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, making their leader, Chief Joseph, a symbol of Indian resistance. When the Nez Percé finally surrendered, they were taken to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, then moved from place to place over the next several years as many of them grew sick and died.

Military might alone does not explain the government victories. U.S. troops could communicate by telegraph and travel by railroad, and their force was augmented by the cooperation of white ranchers, homesteaders, and prospectors seeking minerals on Indian lands. Over time, the United States won more by attrition than by victory on the battlefield; Indians could not sustain resistance when their traditional ways of life that relied on access to land were so disrupted that they could not even get food.

That disruption was perhaps most evident in the destruction of the buffalo that had once roamed the plains in huge herds, as many as twenty-five million animals at their peak. Plains tribes—both nomads such as the Blackfeet, Crows, and Comanches, and agricultural groups such as the Pawnees and Wichitas—had depended on the buffalo, not only for meat, but also for hides to make tepees and for robes to keep warm.

The buffalo herds had been dwindling under the impact of commercial hunting since midcentury, but disaster struck after 1870. Philadelphia tanners perfected a new process for turning buffalo hides into cheap leather, and railroads provided a new way to get the hides to market. Hunters took well over four million buffalo between 1872 and 1874, leaving much of the meat to rot. "The buffalo," wrote one army officer who saw the slaughter, "melted away like snow before a summer's sun."

The buffalo slaughter devastated the economy of the Plains Indians, while their white "sympathizers" in the East proposed reforms in government policy that fostered further repression of indigenous cultures. Appalled by decades of atrocity and war, reformers wanted Indians to

"You Should Take Allotments . . .": Responding to the Dawes Act

American Indians were not immune from pressures to accommodate to the new industrial order, as illustrated in this selection from the biography of Edward Goodbird, a member of the Hidatsa tribe in Minnesota. He describes the period immediately following the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887, when Plains Indians were made to give up communal ways of life for individual family farms. Goodbird's experience was exceptional: he prospered under the new system, ultimately becoming an employee of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The time came when we had to forsake our village at Like-a-fish-hook Bend, for the government wanted the Indians to become farmers. "You should take allotments," our [Bureau of Indian Affairs] agent would say. "The big game is being killed off, and you must plant bigger fields or starve. The government will give you plows and cattle."

All knew that the agent's words were true, and little by little our village was broken up. In the summer of my sixteenth year nearly a third of my tribe left to take up allotments. . . .

My father left the village, with my mother and me, in June. He had a wagon, given him by the agent. . . . We camped at Independence in a tepee, while we busied ourselves building a cabin. My father cut the logs; they were notched at the ends, to lock into one another at the corners. . . . The floor was of earth, but we had a stove. We were a month putting up our cabin. . . .

Our agent issued to every Indian family having an allotment a plow, and wheat, flax, and oats for seeding. My father and I broke land near our cabin, and in the spring seeded it down. We had a fair harvest in the fall. Threshing was done on the agency machine, and, having sacked our grain, my father and I hauled it, in four trips to Hebron, eighty miles away. Our flax sold for seventy-five cents, our wheat for sixty cents, and our oats for twenty-five cents a bushel. Our four loads brought us about eighty dollars.

I became greatly interested in farming . . . one day the agent sent for me. I went to his office.

"I hear you have become a good farmer," he said, as I came in. "I want to appoint you assistant to our agency farmer. . . . You are to measure off for every able-bodied Indian, ten acres of ground to be plowed and seeded. If an Indian is lazy and will not attend to his plowing, report him to me and I will send a policeman. . . ."

I began my new duties at once. . . .

Edward Goodbird, *Goodbird the Indian: His Story* (1914).

assimilate. To that end, they supported coercion on three fronts: suppressing Indian religion and undercutting tribal authority, educating Indian children in American Protestant values, and replacing communal landholding with private property.

Persuaded that Indians would adapt to white culture, Congress passed the Dawes, or Indian Allotment, Act of 1887, breaking reservation lands into individually owned plots. The act allowed the president to grant American citizenship to Indians who were willing to abandon their communal ways. Families who adopted what the law called "habits of civilized life" would be granted ownership of 160 acres. With tribal consent, the government could sell reservation land to white purchasers, holding the proceeds for the "education and civilization" of Indians. The Dawes Act reaffirmed the right of Congress to grant building rights on Indian lands to railroad and telegraph companies.

The Indian Allotment Act led to a massive transfer of land from Indian to white ownership. When it passed, Indians still held 138 million acres. Within thirteen years, their domain had shrunk to less than 78 million acres, virtually all of it unsuited to the agricultural life the federal government tried to foist on the Indians. Moreover, the Bureau of Indian Affairs destroyed many traditional villages. A few years after allotment, one white observer described the remains of the Hidatsa village at Like-a-fishhook Bend in Minnesota as "rings of dirt where the lodges used to stand, half-filled cache holes all covered with weeds" (Map 1.3).

Over the next decades, white reformers tried relentlessly to stamp out tribal customs. Communal ceremonies, including all kinds of feasts and rituals, were banned. Government-funded boarding schools removed Indian boys and girls from tribal homes—often forcibly—and taught the language and values of the white majority. One young Sioux who was made

Mass Burial
The day after the "battle" of Wounded Knee, the dead Sioux — estimated by the U.S. Army at 84 men, 44 women, and 18 children — were buried in a mass grave at the scene of the massacre on the Pine Ridge Reservation Agency, South Dakota. George Trager, *Burial of the Dead at the Battle of Wounded Knee, [South Dakota]*, 1891, number P1967.103, albumen silver print, 4⅝ × 7⁷⁄₁₆ inches — Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

MAP 1.3 Exiling Indians in Their Native Land

Indians resisted the white settlement that overran the Great Plains after the Civil War. But by 1890, Indians had been forced to cede vast territories that they had once occupied, and they found themselves confined to scattered reservations, almost always on poor-quality land.

to attend a government school at Pine Ridge later recalled how "we looked terrible" in European clothes. "But we had to wear them or be punished."

Although they no longer possessed the means to openly resist this systematic destruction of their way of life, many Plains Indians did not simply accept their fate. In 1888, Wovoka, a young man of the Nevada Paiutes, began preaching his vision of an Indian messiah who would return the American continent to the Indians, bring back the buffalo, and return the dead to life. In a message to a Cheyenne-Arapaho delegation, Wovoka warned "Do not tell the white people" about his prophesies. To prepare for the great day, followers practiced a mystical dance, which white observers dubbed the "Ghost Dance."

Alarmed as the dance swept through Sioux encampments in the fall of 1890, Indian Bureau agents called for U.S. Army assistance. Thousands of

"... A Very Sad Sight": The Wounded Knee Massacre

American Horse, a Sioux leader, describes the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, 1890.

The men were separated ... from the women, and they were surrounded by the soldiers. Then came next the village of the Indians and that was entirely surrounded by the soldiers also. When the firing began, of course the people who were standing immediately around the young man who fired the first shot were killed right together, and then they turned their guns, Hotchkiss guns, etc. upon the women who were in the lodges standing there under a flag of truce, and of course as soon as they were fired upon they fled....

[T]he women and children of course were strewn all along the circular village until they were dispatched [killed]. Right near the flag of truce a mother was shot down with her infant; the child not knowing that its mother was dead was still nursing, and that especially was a very sad sight. The women as they were fleeing with their babies were killed together, shot right through, and the women who were very heavy with child were also killed. All the Indians fled ... and after most all of them had been killed a cry was made that all those who were not killed or wounded should come forth and they would be safe. Little boys who were not wounded came out of their places of refuge, and as soon as they came in sight a number of soldiers surrounded them and butchered them there....

Of course it would have been all right if only the men were killed; we would feel almost grateful for it. But the fact of the killing of the women, and more especially the killing of the young boys and girls who are to go to make up the future strength of the Indian people, is the saddest part of the whole affair and we feel it very sorely.

Robert D. Marcus and David Burner, eds., *America Firsthand* (1989).

Sioux fled to the Dakota Badlands. On December 28, the Seventh Cavalry entered the Sioux encampment at Wounded Knee Creek to search for arms. In the ensuing confrontation, army troops massacred at least 146 people. The Wounded Knee massacre came to signify the violence the white majority was prepared to use to enforce its version of civilization.

Western Farming and Ranching The suppression of American Indians did not quell conflict in the West. Groups with conflicting visions—cattle drovers, sheepherders, farmers, miners, and others—also struggled with one another for domination of the land. Like immigrant factory workers and southern hill farmers, these people found their working lives transformed by the development of industrial capitalism, the expansion of market relationships, and decisions made in eastern boardrooms.

Federal Indian policies and subsidies to build the national railroad network gave a tremendous boost to western settlement and tied the region's farmers into distant markets. Anglo settlers entered New Mexico and Colorado in the 1870s, for example, as the railroad was being completed. The region's economy had been defined for generations by Mexican farm families engaged in subsistence and communal farming and in herding on community-regulated common lands. With the coming of the railroads, this system gave way to commercial farming on private homesteads and to cattle and sheep ranching financed by eastern capital and linked by rail to distant slaughterhouses. By 1889, nearly 72,000 miles of track connected farms west of the Mississippi River to the national and international economies.

Agricultural productivity grew enormously, especially on the Great Plains. Farmers eagerly bought harvesting and threshing machinery on the installment plan, counting on increased output. A single farmer working by hand could reap about seven acres of wheat during the ten days it was in its prime; using automatic binders that cut and tied bundles of wheat, common by 1890, the same farmer could harvest 135 acres. The resulting vast supply enabled the United States to export one-third of its wheat crop by 1900.

But despite rapid productivity gains, the machinery purchases left Plains farmers—already in debt to mortgage holders in the East and in Europe—even more dependent on credit in an agricultural market that was extremely unstable. In the early 1880s, unusually heavy rainfall and temporarily rising wheat prices created boom conditions. But later in the decade, rainfall dropped to its normal level, and drought threatened. Equally important, the price of wheat dropped on the world market. In actual buying power, farmers suffered from seriously fluctuating prices, especially during times of depression: the early and middle 1870s, the late 1880s, and the early and middle 1890s.

Like backcountry southern farmers, Plains farmers were whipsawed by falling prices and rising production costs. They had to produce more just to stay even and pay for their machinery, but the more they produced, the lower prices fell. Developments outside farmers' control further dragged down the price of their crops. Mechanization and the opening of new grain-producing land in Argentina, Canada, and Russia flooded the world market with wheat and corn.

The railroads also contributed to the rising costs of farming. In many areas of the West, as in the South, farmers had access to only one railroad line. Railroads charged as much as the traffic would bear, raising rates to make up for losses from rate cutting on competitive routes elsewhere. Freight rates in the West were often two to three times those in the East.

A Sod House

The Sommers family proudly poses for a photographer in front of their sod house in West Custer County, Nebraska, in 1888. One photographer recalled, "Whenever the traveling photographer came 'round, the sodbusters trotted out all of their possessions. The children were always outfitted in their Sunday best." Families were eager to show friends and relatives back East that their new modest-looking homes were practical adaptations to prairie living and not evidence of poverty. Because cameras could not yet photograph dark interiors, settlers did their best to bring outside whatever prized possessions they owned.
Solomon D. Butcher, 1888—Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Plains farmers also had to pay high prices to the operators of elevators, the giant grain-storage bins that loomed on western horizons. As with the railroads, large eastern corporations usually owned the elevators. Freight charges for a bushel of wheat could cost more than it could fetch in the marketplace.

While male farmers used expensive machinery for planting, harvesting, and threshing, most Plains farm women churned by hand, carried water in pails, and cooked at open fireplaces. The fortunate had treadle sewing machines to ease the task of making clothing for entire families. Churning butter and collecting eggs were women's work, and they made money selling these items locally or shipping them to points east. Some also sold garden vegetables, sausages, and bread; others took in boarders or earned money washing, ironing, and sewing for local bachelors. Many families set up housekeeping in huts made from large bricks of prairie sod. Though sturdy and warm, many sod houses were dark, dirty, and leaky. Less fortunate Plains families huddled in tarpaper shacks or dugouts—caves with covered openings.

Farm women had to be extremely resourceful in this primitive environment. What Abigail Scott Duniway, who migrated to Oregon in the 1850s, said of a slightly earlier time remained true in this period. The frontier farmer's wife, she observed, "has to be lady, nurse, laundress, seamstress, cook and dairywoman by turns, and . . . attends to all these duties unaided, save by the occasional assistance of an indulgent husband who has cares enough of his own." Exceptional women like Duniway managed to find time to write in the evenings; her writing skills helped to support the family when her husband suffered a crippling accident and lost the farm.

Although more than one million family farms sprang up in the West during the last forty years of the nineteenth century, many agricultural products came from operations that bore little resemblance to the idealized small family farm. In the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota and in the Central Valley of California, absentee-owned "bonanza farms" of the 1870s and 1880s relied on heavy mechanization and seasonal migrant laborers for large-scale production. By 1880, one 66,000-acre farm along the Sacramento River yielded more than one million bushels of wheat a year. By 1900, the average farm in the Dakotas measured 7,000 acres.

The cattle boom of the early 1880s and rumors of huge profits brought eastern and British investors into ranching. Large corporations dominated the industry, such as the Chicago-owned, three-million-acre XIT Ranch in Texas and the Sparks-Harrell Company in Idaho and Nevada, which grazed 150,000 cattle. Railroads opened even more land for cattle grazing by creating new shipping centers.

Ranching grew heedless of the environmental consequences. Ranchers cared little about the public lands they used for grazing until the mid-1880s, when they faced economic and ecological disaster. The pressure of grazing had led to a decline in grasses and to undernourished cattle. Where it once took five acres to raise a steer, it now took fifty or even more. Bad winters in 1885 and 1886 left hundreds of thousands of cattle dead. Years later, one rancher wrote, "A business that had been fascinating to me before, suddenly became distasteful. I never wanted to own again an animal that I could not feed and shelter." Sheepherders moved into many of the grazing lands after that, because sheep could thrive on nongrass plants that cattle would not eat.

Although westerners who farmed the land, herded animals, and worked in towns were economically interdependent, some clashed fiercely over their different ways of life. Large ranchers fenced public lands; small ones cut the fences. Farmers saw themselves as guardians of settled and sober living in a region rife with lawlessness. They complained that herds trampled crops and that the freewheeling behavior of the cowboys who tended the herds defied law and order. In Kansas, farmers crusaded against saloons, dance halls, and prostitution. Cattle and sheep ranchers feuded with each other, too, although their conflicts were essentially ethnic and religious in origin. In New Mexico, sheep owners were mostly Mexican Americans; in Nevada and southern Idaho, they were Mormons and Basques.

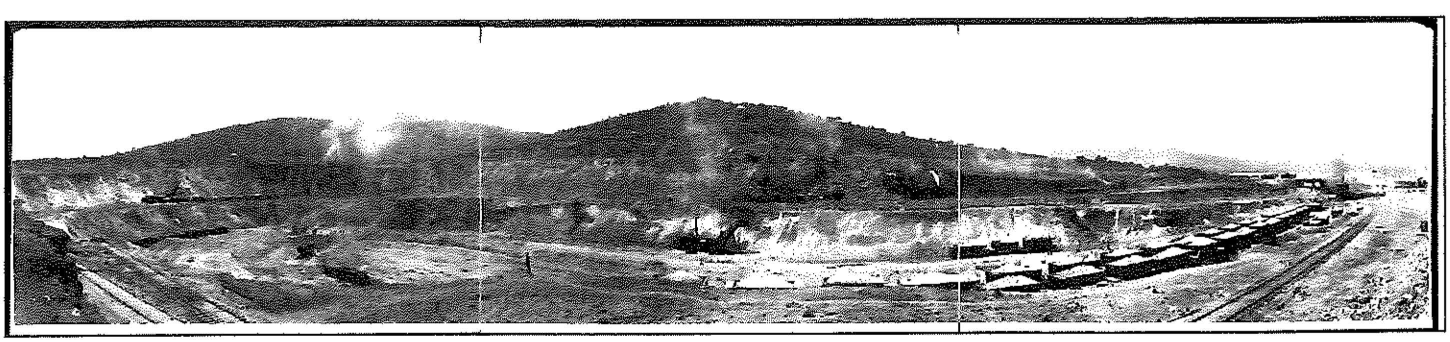
Extractive Industries and Exploited Workers Although grain farming and cattle ranching dominated the western economy, each region developed other specialties, mainly extractive industries that produced massive quantities of raw materials for shipment to other parts of the world. The Pacific Northwest yielded lumber; the Rockies, the Southwest, and California mined metals and coal. The railroad also brought in finished goods of all kinds from the East. Many workers who powered the extractive economy were immigrants like the Irish copper miners of Butte, Montana, and most lived and labored under harsh conditions. But some reaped handsome rewards. Skilled workers in western cities commanded higher wages than their counterparts in the East, and even western farmhands probably had more cash in their pockets than did unskilled industrial workers. But because most regions of the West relied on a single industry, even a slight downturn could bring widespread misery. Boom-and-bust industrial capitalism hit western workers hard.

Large companies had begun shipping lumber to California from the Pacific Northwest in the 1850s and 1860s. Completion of the first railroad linking the Northwest with the East in 1883 created a market for railroad ties and connected the Northwest's small railroads to nationwide systems. As in other industries, technological change increased production in the woods. New saws and axes made it possible to cut trees faster, and the "steam donkey," an engine that pulled logs by cables, took them out of the forest. As a result, the Northwest served markets all over the world.

In other areas, prospecting for metals continued. Miners discovered gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota in the 1870s and in Idaho during the 1880s. Gold and silver mining became even more profitable as copper, lead, and zinc—found in gold and silver deposits—gained importance in industry. European and eastern businessmen poured vast amounts of capital into metal mining and smelting. Many investors ended up with shattered hopes, but others reaped huge profits. After 1879, when Colorado emerged as the nation's leading mining region, eastern capital and western workers unlocked vast stores of mineral wealth.

While Eastern capitalists like the Guggenheims became fabulously rich mining silver, copper, and nitrates, miners labored under horrendous conditions. Fifteen hundred Mexican Americans worked at California's New Almaden Quicksilver Mine, which produced half of the world's supply of mercury, a metal that was essential in the smelting of silver ore. Climbing ladders out of the mine, they hauled 200-pound sacks of ore strapped to their foreheads. Every year, one out of every thirty hard rock miners was disabled and one out of every eighty was killed by an explosion, cave-in, fire, or accident. Many of the rest developed lung diseases.

Western mining towns seemed to mushroom overnight, as Leadville, Colorado, did with the discovery of silver in the Rocky Mountains. From a small cluster of log cabins in 1876, Leadville grew to a sprawling city of 15,000 people four years later. Leadville's experience was repeated across Colorado and Idaho in the 1880s. These towns owed their existence to the mines, but only a minority of their citizens were miners. In Cripple Creek, Colorado, one in four residents worked in the mines; the others provided

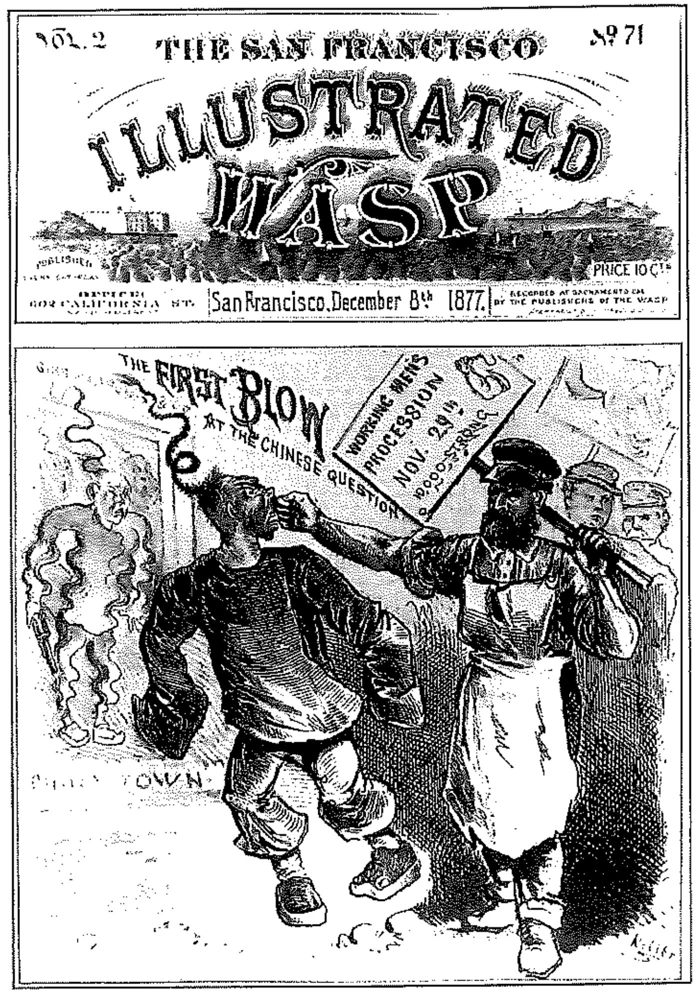


Scarred Landscape

Copper deposits were first found in the hills outside Ely, Nevada, in the 1870s. Mining the copper became profitable only around 1900, with the building of railroad lines and investment by eastern capital. After that, large profits were made by the Nevada Consolidated Copper Company and others by digging open-pit mines in which terraces were cut into the landscape. The mining left the landscape scarred, hillsides denuded, and groundwater contaminated. The Copper Flat pit would eventually measure more than a mile across and almost 1,000 feet deep. West Coast Art Company, Copper Flat, Nevada, c. 1909—Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

services ranging from retailing to prostitution. Western movies recall "parlor houses" with gilt-framed mirrors and brocaded furniture, but most brothels offered plain furnishings and plain sex. The overwhelming majority of women wage-earners on the mining frontier served men in other ways: waitressing and making beds at hotels and restaurants, doing laundry, or cooking and cleaning.

Although mining towns developed a reputation for crudity and lawlessness, they also established stable community institutions. Even Deadwood, South Dakota, known as a sinkhole of gambling, prostitution, and violence, boasted schools, churches, and a theater within months of its founding. As two early residents reminisced, "On one hand could be heard the impassioned call of the itinerant minister of the Gospel, . . . In close proximity would be a loud-voiced gambler calling his game."



Working-class Racism
The cover of the recently founded *Illustrated Wasp*, a West Coast pictorial weekly, offered its support in virulent pictorial terms to white working-class anti-Chinese agitation in San Francisco. San Francisco *Illustrated Wasp*, December 8, 1877—California Section, Negative Number 19,850, California State Library.

The diverse working class of western mining towns included Mexican American miners, Chinese American laborers and launderers, Basque sheepherders, and African American cowboys mixed with European immigrants and white migrants from the East and South. They all participated in an international labor market that helped to populate the West. Indeed, even more of the population of the West than of the East was foreign-born. Between 1860 and 1890, one-third of California's residents were foreign-born, more than twice the proportion of the country as a whole. In 1890, North Dakota had a higher proportion (45 percent) of immigrants than any other state. Immigrants from Scandinavia settled the Great Plains, and many moved on to the Pacific Northwest. Migrants crossed the unregulated Mexican border for short periods to work as field hands or to lay track in Texas, Arizona, and southern California. Also in California, Japanese immigrants and Mexican migrants performed the stoop labor that was required for agriculture. A contract labor system—gangs of workers run by bosses who transported them from abroad and sold their labor—brought Italian workers to California farms and Greek laborers to Utah mining camps.

Of all the western immigrant groups, the Chinese inspired the most hostility. More than 200,000 Chinese, mostly men, had migrated to the United States by 1890. Many had borrowed passage money from labor

"The People Would Always Work Together": Mexican American Homesteaders

In this selection from his handwritten memoir from 1937, Elfido López recalled the communal approach to agriculture that marked his childhood on his family's modest homestead in southern Colorado. The arrival of the railroad in the Southwest in the early 1870s transformed the area's economy and the lives of its residents. Longtime Mexican residents of the area were quickly drawn into the region's expanding wage economy.

When I was 2 years old my father and eleven more men went to Red Rock to file on homesteads. . . . Of the twelve men only six could afford to buy shovels, the other six made shovels out of wood. The shovels were needed to make a irrigation ditch. They had no way to survey the ditch so they just started digging. The men that had good shovels broke the ground and the ones that had wood shovels threw the loose dirt out. . . . They would let the water run behind them and bank it up and dig in front. Then they would let the water run ahead in the ditch to see if they needed to dig the ditch deeper and in this way they made their ditch and it took them four months.

After finishing the irrigation ditch they had to plow their fields. They had no plows, but they made them out of forks of trees. The plows have only one handle, and the points were made out of pieces of iron that the men had sharpened on a rock and nailed to the wood. It was very hard to plow with these plows as they would go every way but straight. They did manage to farm in this way, and they raised good crops of wheat, melons, beans, pumpkins, chili, and almost anything they had to plant. . . .

Each man would not plant more than 3 or 4 acres of wheat as they had no way to cut the wheat except by hand scythes. . . . After they would finish cutting one man's wheat they would go to the next until they had finished the last one. The people would always work together and they never thought that they were doing too much for each other. When a child went to another house the women always gave them something to eat. It was that way with all of them. They did not really have much of anything but they always had something to eat.

Elfido López, "Autobiography," 1937, Elfido López, Sr. Collection. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society.

brokers, who organized crews to do jobs that most white Americans deemed too dangerous and arduous. Railroad laborers, in particular, were recruited in China in the 1870s through this contract labor system, which was much like indentured servitude. Others found work on their own. Lee Chew was an ambitious young man seeking wealth "in the country of American wizards." In the 1880s, he worked as a domestic servant, learning American ways from his employer, sending money to his family, and saving to open a business. With a partner, he opened a laundry, a typical Chinese American

"... Indebted to Her Master/Mistress": A Prostitute's Contract

Almost all of the Chinese who immigrated to the United States before 1900 were men. Of the approximately 100,000 Chinese immigrants who resided in the United States between 1880 and 1900, only 5,000 were women. Some found work as laundresses and servants; others arrived as indentured prostitutes. This 1886 contract describes the stringent conditions under which Xin Jin worked as a prostitute in San Francisco in exchange for payment of her fare from China.

The contractee Xin Jin became indebted to her master/mistress for food and passage from China to San Francisco. Since she is without funds, she will voluntarily work as a prostitute at Tan Fu's place for four and one-half years for an advance of 1,205 yuan (U.S. $524) to pay this debt. There shall be no interest on the money and Xin Jin shall receive no wages. At the expiration of the contract, Xin Jin shall be free to do as she pleases. Until then, she shall first secure the master/mistress's permission if a customer asks to take her out. If she has the four loathsome diseases she shall be returned within 100 days; beyond that time the procurer has no responsibility. Menstruation disorder is limited to one month's rest only. If Xin Jin becomes sick at any time for more than 15 days, she shall work one month extra; if she becomes pregnant, she shall work one year extra. Should Xin Jin run away before her term is out, she shall pay whatever expense is incurred in finding and returning her to the brothel. This is a contract to be retained by the master/mistress as evidence of the agreement. Receipt of 1,205 yuan ($524) by Ah Yo. Thumb print of Xin Jin the contractee. Eighth month 11th day of the 12th year of Guang-zu (1886).

Alexander McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (1948).

business because it required little capital and demanded grueling labor that white Americans were happy to leave to others.

White workingmen claimed that the Chinese were semislaves who would drive down wages, lower the standard of living, and send American wealth to their families in China. Californians formed anti-Chinese clubs in the 1860s; in 1879, Chinese immigrants were denied the vote and public employment in California. Three years later, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended Chinese immigration and made resident Chinese ineligible for naturalization.

Legislation did not stem the tide of anti-Chinese mob violence, which peaked in the mid-1880s throughout the West. White mobs torched the Chinatown near the Union Pacific Railroad coal mine in Rock Springs, Wyoming, and gunned down many of its residents. The bodies of twenty-eight victims were found as the ashes cooled the next day.

"All the Houses Were Burned to Ashes": The Rock Springs Riot

The Union Pacific Railroad employed 331 Chinese and 150 whites in its coal mine in Rock Springs, Wyoming. On September 2, 1885, a dispute between Chinese and white miners erupted into violence. The white miners, members of the Knights of Labor, rioted and burned down the Chinese quarter, killing twenty-eight Chinese and causing $150,000 in property damage. The grim story of the riot was given in the Chinese workers' own words in this memorial, or written statement of facts, that they presented to the Chinese Consul at New York.

Whenever the mob met a Chinese they stopped him and, pointing a weapon at him, asked him if he had any revolver, and then approaching him they searched his person, robbing him of his watch or any gold or silver that he might have about him, before letting him go. Some of the rioters would let a Chinese go after depriving him of all his gold and silver, while another Chinese would be beaten with the butt ends of the weapons before being let go. Some of the rioters, when they could not stop a Chinese, would shoot him dead on the spot, and then search and rob him. Some would overtake a Chinese, throw him down and search and rob him before they would let him go. Some of the rioters would not fire their weapons, but would only use the butt ends to beat the Chinese with. Some would not beat a Chinese, but rob him of whatever he had and let him go, yelling to him to go quickly. Some, who took no part either in beating or robbing the Chinese, stood by, shouting loudly and laughing and clapping their hands. . . .

When the Chinese fled to the different hills they intended to come back to "Chinatown" when the riot was over, to dispose of the dead bodies and to take care of the wounded. But to their disappointment, all the houses were burned to ashes, and there was then no place of shelter for them; they were obliged to run blindly from hill to hill. Taking the railroad as their guide, they walked toward the town of Green River. . . . We felt very thankful to the railroad company for having telegraphed to the conductors of all its trains to pick up such of the Chinese as were to be met with along the line of the railroad and carry them to Evanston. . . .

On the ninth of September the United States government instructed the troops to escort the Chinese back to Rock Springs. When they arrived there they saw only a burnt tract of ground to mark the sites of their former habitations. Some of the dead bodies had been buried by the company, while others, mangled and decomposed, were strewn on the ground and were being eaten by dogs and hogs. Some of the bodies were not found until they were dug out of the ruins of the buildings. Some had been burned beyond recognition. It was a sad and painful sight to see the son crying for the father, the brother for the brother, the uncle for the nephew, and friend for friend.

Memorial of Chinese Laborers, Resident at Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, to the Chinese Consul at New York (1885). Reprinted in Cheng-Tsu Wu, ed., *Chink!* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1972), 152–164.

Conclusion: Capitalism and the Meaning of Democracy

The United States was the world's richest nation in 1893. Mechanization in both factory production and agriculture had changed forever the way most Americans worked and lived. A vast national and international market linked the miner in the Far West, the tenant farmer in the South, the steelworker in the Midwest, and the garment worker in New York City.

Individuals and families seeking opportunities in industrializing America made new lives for themselves and for their nation. The lure of the "Golden Mountain" brought young men from rural China and Japan. Commercialized agriculture and industrial depression drove millions of young European men and women to the "land of opportunity." Poor Mexican families from agricultural areas were drawn to the expanding economy of the Southwest. And young American-born working-class couples sought their fortunes in the West or set up their own businesses.

Beneath the attractions of individual opportunity and technological progress, however, lay pervasive destitution and discontent. As large industrial and financial institutions secured ever-greater economic and political power, ordinary Americans of all ethnic backgrounds found themselves increasingly subject to forces beyond their control. Lifelong wage earning meant dependence and a betrayal of the longstanding American dream of being beholden to no one, once symbolized by the autonomous farmer and the self-employed artisan. Workers' earnings and the prices they paid for goods were subject to the impersonal mechanisms of world trade and to decisions that were made on behalf of profit in remote corporate boardrooms. Class relations became more stratified. Paupers, multimillionaires, and members of a new middle class all increased in number, but they had little daily contact with one another. What did "democracy" mean in a society with such vast inequalities of economic wealth and political power?

American working people — men and women, wage earners and farmers, American Indians, African Americans, Mexican Americans, European and Chi-

The Street of the Gamblers (by Day)

Arnold Genthe's photographs of San Francisco's Chinatown provide information about the Chinese community at the turn of the century. His characterization of his subjects, however, often conveys a distorted and ominous message. Despite its title, this photograph of Ross Alley, taken some time around New Year's, simply depicts the unusual daytime congestion resulting from the seasonal unemployment of many Chinatown workers after the holiday. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

nese immigrants, and descendents of early white settlers—struggled to square the traditional promises of democracy with the realities of a society characterized by economic concentration and previously unimaginable wealth. In communities based on shared ethnic and craft traditions, working people's daily interactions and the organizations they formed fostered support and solidarity for individuals. Those communities and organizations also nourished resistance to employers and to capitalism itself, in a wide spectrum of protest and class conflict that marked the era.

The Years in Review

1873

- The collapse of Jay Cooke & Co. sets off a nationwide financial panic.

1877

- In the Compromise of 1877, a special electoral commission grants the presidential election victory to Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes in return for promises to Southern Democrats. These promises include the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, thereby ending Reconstruction.
- The "Indian barrier" to white settlement of the West is removed after the U.S. Army crushes Sioux rebellion and kills Sioux leader Crazy Horse.
- The U.S. Army chases the Nez Percé for 1,700 miles through Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana until they surrender.

1878

- A five-year depression ends, during which over half a million working people were unemployed.

1879

- California denies Chinese immigrants the right to vote and public employment.
- Congress grants women lawyers the right to argue before the Supreme Court.
- Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* blames inequality and corruption on the private ownership of land.

1880

- Republican James Garfield defeats Civil War General Winfield Scott Hancock for the presidency.

1881

- Disappointed job seeker Charles Guiteau assassinates President Garfield; Chester Arthur becomes president.

1882

- Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act, suspending Chinese immigration for ten years and declaring resident Chinese ineligible for naturalization.

1883

- The Pendleton Act creates the Civil Service Commission to hire federal workers on the basis of scores on competitive examinations.
- Clocks nationwide are set to a new uniform standard time.

1884

- Democrat Grover Cleveland defeats James B. Blaine for the presidency in a dirty campaign in which Cleveland's sex life and draft dodging are issues.

1885

- A dispute between Chinese and white miners at a coal mine in Rock Springs, Wyoming, erupts in violence as white miners rampage through the town's Chinese quarter, killing twenty-eight Chinese and causing $150,000 in property damage.

1886

- Geronimo surrenders to U.S. forces, ending Apache resistance to federal efforts to resettle them.
- The last remaining nonstandard railroad lines shift to the standard gauge.

1887

- The Interstate Commerce Act establishes a weak federal system of railroad regulation.
- The Dawes Act (Indian Allotment Act) converts communal Indian lands to individual plots in an effort to "civilize" the Indians.

1888

- Republican Benjamin Harrison is elected president in the electoral college, even though Democrat Grover Cleveland, the incumbent president, wins the popular vote.

1889

- The number of states in the Union rapidly expands with the admission of Nevada (1864); Nebraska (1867); Colorado (1876); North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Montana (1889); and Idaho and Wyoming (1890).
- Electric lights are installed in the White House, but President and Mrs. Harrison do not touch them.

1890

- Congress passes the Sherman Antitrust Act, which does little to stop the growth of trusts but is used against labor unions.
- Federal troops massacre 146 Sioux at Wounded Knee.

1892

- Grover Cleveland is elected president for a second term, making him the only person to serve two nonconsecutive terms in that office.
- George Ferris designs the Ferris wheel for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.
- The "Pledge of Allegiance" is introduced as part of the 400-year celebration of Columbus's "discovery" of America.

1893

- The Federal Railroad Safety Appliance Act makes it illegal for trains to operate without automatic couplers and air brakes.

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