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From Depression to Expansion: Industrial Capitalism Triumphs at Home and Abroad

1893-1900

On May 1, 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition—Chicago's great world's fair commemorating the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas—opened to the public. Chicago's leading merchants, bankers, and real estate men raised millions of dollars to build a dazzling exhibition that would publicize to the world the cultural and economic achievements of their city and nation and express U.S. businessmen's desire to compete for world markets. Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham, who oversaw construction of the exposition's "White City," proclaimed that the fair would constitute the third great event in American history, preceded only by the Revolution and the Civil War. The architects and artists who designed the neoclassical buildings of the White City saw themselves as heirs to the Italian Renaissance who would remake and purify American culture through their work. "Look here, old fellow," the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens told Burnham at a planning session, "do you realize that this is the greatest meeting of artists since the fifteenth century?"

But the White City's shining marble edifices were a sham; the "marble" was really just plaster covering wood and steel. An even deeper contradiction lay outside the fairgrounds. At almost the same moment that the fair opened for business, thousands of factory gates swung closed as the nation plunged into one of the worst depressions in its history. "From all the manufacturing and commercial centres," declared the New York City branch of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) just months after the fair's triumphant opening, "there comes the anxious demand for work, soon we fear to be followed by the despairing cry for bread." Alluding directly to the Columbian Exposition, they complained that "a few thousand men and women enjoy the opulence of eastern potentates, while abject millions

Theater at the Brickyard
The workforce of a Massachusetts brick factory proudly posed for a photographer sometime in the late nineteenth century. Ashfield Historical Society, Ashfield, Massachusetts.

grovel in the dust begging for work and bread. This is the industrial and social exhibit of our Columbian year."

Industrial workers and activist farmers responded to the hard times with militant action and with radical electoral campaigns, organizing the most successful political movements outside the major parties in American history—campaigns that built on the solidarity and the cooperative vision of the struggles of the 1880s. But before the century was over, those movements would be sharply defeated. Still worse, immigrants and southern blacks faced a rising tide of nativism and racism. Business interests sought to limit economic depressions by expanding U.S. markets and territories overseas. Recovery from the depression—fostered in part by the expansion of U.S. capitalism abroad (most dramatically evident in the Spanish-Cuban-American War)—improved the material conditions of farmers and working people. Fewer workers could be found "begging for work," but it would be many years before they would regain the political clout they had exerted in the 1880s or 1890s. The triumphant claims of U.S. economic and cultural strength made by the capitalists who planned the White City would ring much more true in 1900 than they had in 1893.

Hard Times and Hard Struggles

The Depression that hit as the White City opened devastated working people and their communities. It also provoked strong reactions. "Industrial armies" set out for Washington to demand public works jobs. And when the Pullman Company responded to hard times with layoffs and wage cuts, its workers launched a massive nationwide boycott and strike against all trains with Pullman cars. But court injunctions and federal troops defeated them.

The Depression of the 1890s The bankruptcy of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and the National Cordage Company (a group of rope manufacturers) in the first half of 1893 set off a stock market crash, a run on gold, and a banking "panic." By year's end, about 500 banks and 16,000 businesses were bankrupt. Having led the economy into growth, the railroads now pushed it into depression. By the middle of 1894, more than 150 railroad companies were also bankrupt, stimulating trouble in other industries. Weakness in the agricultural economy suggested the extent to which farming was tied into national and international markets. And when farmers fell on bad times, they in turn dragged down farm machine manufacturers, grain elevator operators, and a variety of rural and small-town businesses.

This was the fifth major depression in American history (the others began in 1819, 1837, 1857, and 1873). Each depression was usually bigger than

". . . We Are Starving to Death": The 1893 Depression in Kansas

In this 1894 letter to the governor of Kansas, Susan Orcutt describes the devastation experienced by western Kansas farming communities caught in the iron grip of the depression (spelling and punctuation corrected).

I take my pen in hand to let you know that we are Starving to death. It is Pretty hard to do without anything to Eat here in this God forsaken country. We would of had Plenty to Eat if the hail hadn't cut our rye down and ruined our corn and Potatoes. I had the Prettiest Garden that you Ever seen and the hail ruined It and I have nothing to look at. My Husband went away to find work and came home last night and told me that we would have to Starve. He had been in ten countys and did not Get no work. It is Pretty hard for a woman to do without anything to Eat when She doesn't know what minute She will be confined to bed. If I was in Iowa I would be all right. I was born there and raised there. I haven't had nothing to Eat today and It is three o'clock.

Lewelling Papers, Kansas Historical Society (1894).

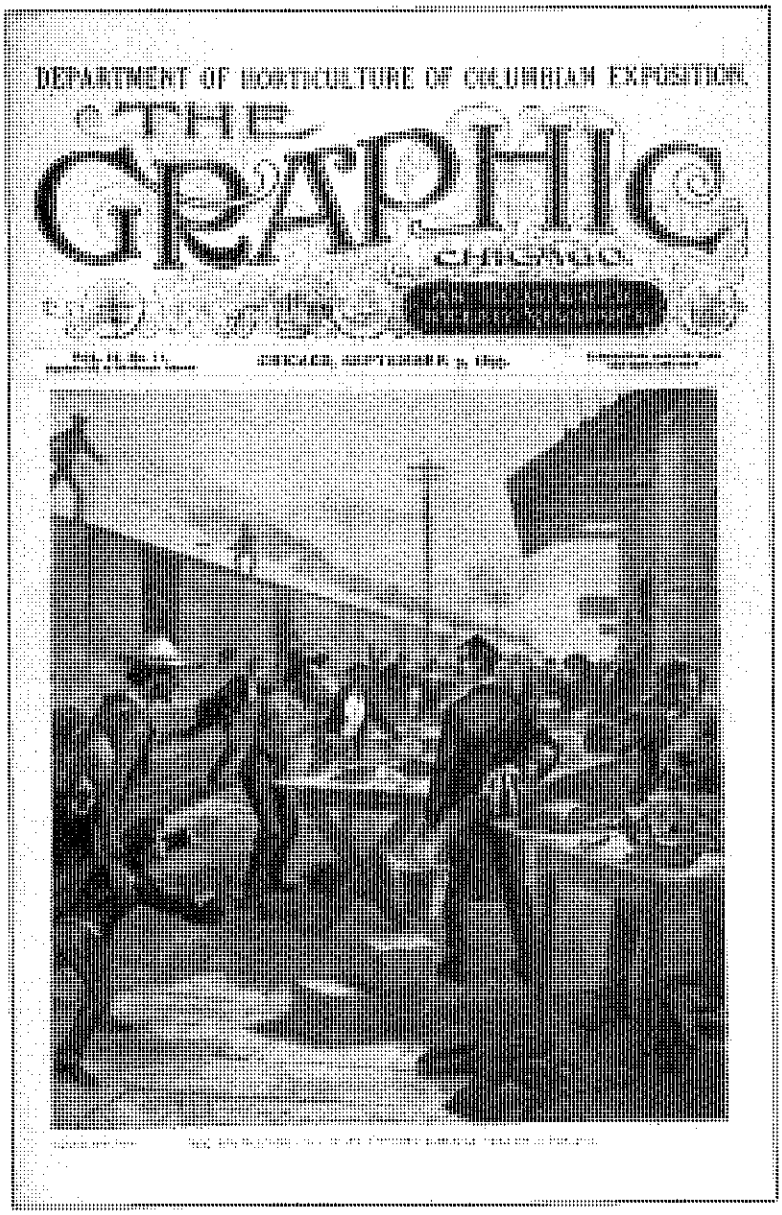
the one before, and because the economy and the population kept growing, more people—and a greater proportion of people—were affected each time. More people worked for wages and paid for goods in cash; fewer bartered their labor and the goods they made or the food they grew. The increasingly national economy left Americans progressively more vulnerable to economic forces that they could not control. What happened on Wall Street now affected the lives of Massachusetts railroad workers and Mississippi sharecroppers who would never own stocks or bonds.

The five years of depression brought misery on a scale that had not previously been experienced in industrial America. Plant closings threw Americans out of work in staggering numbers. Although no one bothered to keep track of unemployment in this era, probably more than 15 percent of nonagricultural workers lost their jobs. As in previous depressions, the unemployed and the homeless traveled the country, hopping freight trains to distant places in search of work or handouts.

The statistics mask the depression's devastating impact on individual lives. Consider George A. Smith, laid off by the Boston and Maine and Fitchburg railroads because of the "dull times" in November 1893. Neighbors described Smith, a twenty-seven-year-old father of two, as a "steady, industrious man," but over the next four months, he could pick up only two weeks of work. Having exhausted his savings, he and his family had not even enough money to heat their apartment, buy yeast to bake bread, or pay for a doctor for their ailing son. Facing eviction by an unsympathetic landlord, a desperate Smith sought refuge at the local police station. Smith and his family fared better than some during the hard years of the depression.

"R. N.," a jobless Boston man, shot himself in the head in June 1896. The state medical examiner noted that R. N. "left a letter explaining that he killed himself to save others the trouble of caring for him."

Organized public and private relief efforts did not come close to meeting the needs of unemployed workers like Smith or "R. N." Many middle- and upper-class whites viewed relief with distaste, believing that "getting something for nothing" was a sin. Some described charity as socialistic; others said that it encouraged laziness. Moved by the plight of an unemployed man with five hungry children, a Massachusetts overseer of the poor gave the man some money but carefully covered up his good deed "so that it wouldn't get out." Social Darwinists viewed such charitable acts as wrongheaded, believing that hard times would weed out the "unfit." Local charity organization societies regulated relief efforts to determine who was "worth" helping by prying into the circumstances of poor people's lives. Overall, public assistance and formal charities provided only marginal assistance to the jobless. The down and out more commonly relied on the kindness of family, friends, and neighbors. "The kind that always helps you out," observed one tramp, is "the kind that's in hard luck themselves, and knows what it is."



Riding the Rails in Search of Work

At a rural station, free soup and bread drew hungry unemployed people from their hiding places in railroad freight cars. Joseph P. Birren, *The Graphic*, September 9, 1893 — Chicago Historical Society.

As millions of families faced starvation, labor organizations demanded that government help by creating jobs. In December 1893, declaring that "the right to work is the right to live," the annual convention of the AFL asked the federal government to issue $500 million in paper money to fund public works. Such demands augured a long-term shift (that would be completed only in the 1930s) in which working people and others gradually came to see the needs of the jobless as more than a local obligation in the manner of charity poor relief.

Workers on the March Responding to their own misery and to the contempt of their social "betters," some unemployed workers began to mount protests. In 1894, Ohio businessman Jacob S. Coxey organized a march in

Keep Off the Grass!: Coxey's Army Invades the Nation's Capital

When Jacob Coxey tried to speak at the U.S. Capitol, police arrested him for walking on the grass. Fifty years to the day later, in 1944, Coxey finally delivered this speech from the steps of the U.S. Congress.

We stand here to remind Congress of its promise of returning prosperity should the Sherman act be repealed. We stand here to declare by our march of over 400 miles through difficulties and distress, a march unstained by even the slightest act which would bring the blush of shame to any, that we are law-abiding citizens, and as men our actions speak louder than words We are here to petition for legislation which will furnish employment for every man able and willing to work; for legislation which will bring universal prosperity and emancipate our beloved country from financial bondage to the descendants of King George. We have come to the only source which is competent to aid the people in their day of dire distress. We are here to tell our Representatives, who hold their seats by grace of our ballots, that the struggle for existence has become too fierce and relentless. We come and throw up our defenseless hands, and say, help, or we and our loved ones must perish. We are engaged in a bitter and cruel war with the enemies of all mankind—a war with hunger, wretchedness, and despair, and we ask Congress to heed our petitions and issue for the nation's good a sufficient volume of the same kind of money which carried the country through one awful war and saved the life of the nation.

J. S. COXEY
Commander of the Commonweal of Christ

Congressional Record, 53rd Cong., 2d sess. (9 May 1894): 4512. Reprinted in George Brown Tindall, ed., *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 160–163.

support of his own job creation scheme that emphasized federal spending on public works. To publicize the plan, Coxey recruited an "industrial army" of the unemployed to march on Washington, D.C. "We will send a petition to Washington with boots on," Coxey declared.

Thousands cheered Coxey's band of a few hundred marchers as they moved from one industrial town to another. Thorstein Veblen, a young sociologist, saw the march as more significant than its size suggested. Coxey's appeal to the federal government for relief, Veblen argued, asserted that government had a basic responsibility for the people's welfare, a radical notion at the time—and one that the federal government did not share. Although Coxey's band numbered fewer than 500 when they arrived in Washington on the morning of May 1, 1894, worried national officials had massed 1,500 troops to greet them. Police arrested Coxey and two other

On the Road to Washington, D.C.
Members of Coxey's Army marched into Alleghany, Virginia, their progress marked by a Chicago reporter on horseback. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 19, 1894 — American Social History Project.

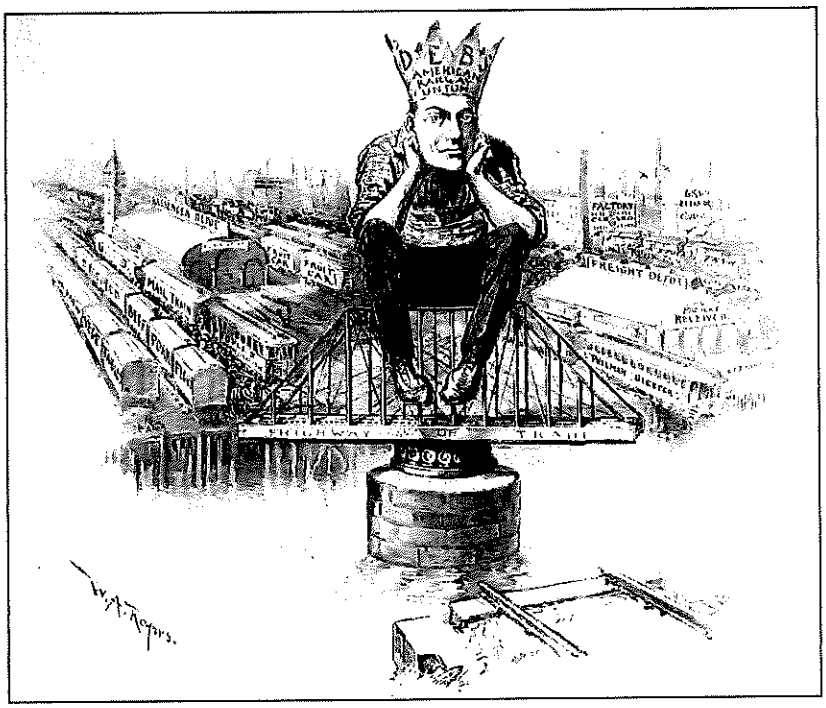
leaders for carrying banners on the Capitol grounds, and the marchers disbanded.

Nevertheless, Coxey's movement inspired dozens of industrial armies to set out for Washington that year. In the Far West, their ranks numbered in the thousands. Most traveled on foot, but they sometimes seized trains. The federal government moved as forcefully against them as it had against Coxey. U.S. Attorney General Richard C. Olney, a former railroad lawyer, deployed U.S. marshals and federal troops to end the train seizures. Although troops stopped the hijackings and curtailed the eastward movement of the armies, about 1,200 marchers made the cross-country trek all the way to Washington during 1894.

Olney also fought the protestors on another front: the courts, which stifled protests and especially labor activities by issuing injunctions. Injunctions had begun to be used against the 1877 railroad strikes, and they grew in number and importance in the 1880s. In some of the key struggles of the 1890s, court injunctions would prove to be a powerful antilabor weapon.

Pullman: Solidarity and Defeat The defeat of Coxey's Army did not end the escalating conflict between the haves and the have-nots. As the depression worsened, Olney used federal troops and injunctions to quell a major strike against the Pullman Palace Car Company, but this time, a violent confrontation erupted.

Contemporaries knew the Pullman Company not only for its famous railroad sleeping cars, but also for its "model" company town: Pullman, Illinois, just south of Chicago. The company charged rents that were 20 to 25 percent higher than rents for similar housing in Chicago and made huge



King Debs

Eugene Debs, president of the American Railway Union, was lambasted by much of the press during the Pullman strike. This *Harper's Weekly* cartoon, like many other published pictures, portrayed Debs as a tyrant paralyzing the country's commerce, but it also made his face familiar to readers across the nation. William A. Rogers, *Harper's Weekly*, July 14, 1894 — Scott Molloy Labor Archives.

profits on utility bills, which, like the rent, they deducted from workers' pay. "We are born in a Pullman house," one employee declared, "fed from the Pullman shop, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in the Pullman church, and when we die we shall be buried in the Pullman cemetery and go to the Pullman hell."

As the depression worsened, George Pullman responded by firing one-third of his employees, cutting the wages of the rest by 25 to 40 percent, and refusing to reduce rents or food prices at the company store. Rebuffed in their efforts at negotiating with the company, Pullman workers walked off the job on May 11, 1894. "Pullman, both the man and the town," the strikers declared, "is an ulcer on the body politic." A local minister put it even more pungently: "George is a bad egg—handle him with care. Should you crack his shell the odor would depopulate Chicago in an hour."

The strikers appealed to the American Railway Union (ARU) for support. Formed in 1893 by charismatic activist Eugene V. Debs and a group of western railroad workers who were still in the Knights of Labor, the ARU was the fastest-growing union in the United States. It had over 150,000 members, more than all the other railroad unions combined. The ARU offered a new model of industrial unionism. It charged low dues and—in contrast to the craft-oriented AFL—accepted all white wage workers employed by railroads, whatever their skill levels or specific jobs. "Even the laundresses who cleaned the sheets from the sleeping compartments" could join, reported Florence Kelley, the chief factory inspector of Illinois. But despite Debs's attempt to admit them, the union excluded African Americans.

". . . An Ulcer on the Body Politic": A Pullman Striker Speaks Out

The men and women who labored in George Pullman's "model" town during the 1893 depression endured starvation wages and deplorable living and working conditions. They especially loathed Pullman's paternalistic control over all aspects of their lives. This statement from a Pullman striker, delivered at the June 1894 Chicago convention of the American Railway Union, suggests the depth of the strikers' hatred of their employer and their commitment to the ARU.

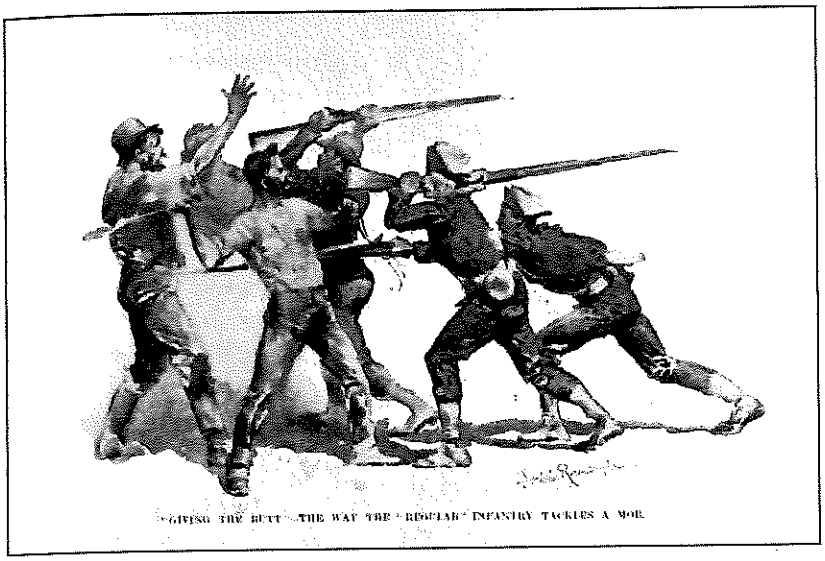
We struck at Pullman because we were without hope. We joined the American Railway Union because it gave us a glimmer of hope. Twenty thousand souls, men, women, and little ones, have their eyes turned toward this convention today, straining eagerly through dark despondency for a glimmer of the heaven-sent message you alone can give us on this earth.

In stating to this body our grievances it is hard to tell where to begin. . . . Five reductions in wages, work, and in conditions of employment swept through the shops at Pullman between May and December 1893. The last was the most severe, amounting to nearly 30 percent and our rents had not fallen. . . . No man or woman of us all can ever hope to own one inch of George Pullman's land. Why even the very streets are his. . . .

Pullman, both the man and the town, is an ulcer on the body politic. He owns the houses, the schoolhouses, the churches of God. . . . The revenue he derives from these, the wages he pays out with one hand—the Pullman Palace Car Company, he takes back with the other—the Pullman Land Association. He is able by this to bid under any contract car shop in the country. His competitors in business, to meet this, must reduce the wages of their men. . . . And thus the merry war—the dance of skeletons bathed in human tears—goes on, and it will go on, brothers, forever, unless you, the American Railway Union, stop it; end it; crush it out.

U.S. Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago Strike of June–July 1894* (1895).

The ARU called for a boycott and a strike against all trains hauling Pullman cars. Because nearly every railroad had Pullmans, this meant a national strike and a far more crippling one than the great railroad strikes of 1877. Unlike the largely spontaneous revolt of 1877, the ARU carefully organized the Pullman strike. Committees across the country coordinated their activities with the strike's headquarters in Chicago. When the boycott started on June 26, the General Managers' Association, an organization of twenty-six railroads operating in Chicago, ordered the discharge of any workers who refused to handle Pullman cars. In response, ARU members around the country brought most of the nation's rail traffic to a halt. Thus, an isolated labor dispute became, in Debs's words, "a contest between the producing classes and the money power of the country." An estimated 260,000 railroad workers joined the battle.



"Chicago Under the Mob"
An ardent admirer of the military, artist-reporter Frederic Remington displayed no sympathy for the Pullman strikers in his reports for *Harper's Weekly*. Endorsing suppression, Remington described the strikers as a "malodorous crowd of foreign trash," talking "Hungarian or Polack, or whatever the stuff is." Frederic Remington, *Harper's Weekly*, July 21, 1894 — American Social History Project.

Then railroad managers played their trump card, appealing to Attorney General Olney, who still served on the boards of several railroads, for a sweeping injunction from the federal courts in early July that effectively outlawed the strike. Federal troops and state militia were then dispatched in six states. In Chicago, the arrival of the U.S. Army on the Fourth of July precipitated a violent confrontation with workers that left thirteen dead and more than fifty wounded and caused hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to railroad property. Almost 3,000 U.S. deputy marshals backed the federal troops. Even the Chicago chief of police later described the deputies as nothing more than "thugs, thieves, and ex-convicts."

During the next week, violence erupted in twenty-six states. Freight cars and other equipment burned in railroad yards, destroying merchandise as well as railroad property. "The strike is now war," screamed a headline in the *Chicago Tribune*. By July 11, an estimated thirty-four people had died. When Debs and other ARU leaders were arrested for disobeying the injunction, the strike began to collapse. In the bitter aftermath, courts convicted Debs and other leaders of civil contempt and sentenced them to prison. The railroads blacklisted many strikers.

Although many prominent citizens criticized the handling of the strike, the notoriously conservative Supreme Court, in a case called *In Re Debs*, upheld the use of injunctions against strikes and unions. It decreed, in effect, that strikes were a conspiracy in restraint of trade. That decision laid the groundwork for the continued use of state militias, federal troops, and injunctions to defend the interests of capital and undercut the strength of the labor movement by preventing communication among striking locals and jailing strike leaders. These new legal tactics would cripple militant unionism for decades.

The Pullman strike sharpened the lines of class struggle. Like Homestead two years earlier, it reminded workers of the combined power of capitalists' private armies and the military force of the federal and state governments. Some labor leaders argued that workers could respond only by creating a labor party that would fight for political power in tandem with the unions' struggle for industrial justice. They viewed the Democrats and Republicans as more interested in party patronage than in the worker's lot. In part because of the defeat of the Pullman strike, ARU leaders joined other labor activists in uniting with a movement that until that time had been

mostly agrarian. Urging labor to seek change at the ballot box rather than on the picket line, they joined with the rapidly rising People's Party, one of the largest and most powerful third parties in American history.

The Populist Moment

The People's Party and the larger populist movement shared with the Knights of Labor a communitarian and collective vision that challenged the acquisitive individualism of the Gilded Age. It had roots in the cooperative efforts of the Farmers' Alliance, which spread rapidly across rural America in the 1880s. By 1890, it had moved into politics and created the People's Party, which crafted a bold challenge to the status quo in its Omaha Platform. It won some dramatic victories in 1892 and four years later united behind the eloquent Democratic Party presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, who powerfully challenged the gold standard. But William McKinley squarely defeated Bryan and quashed the Populist challenge to industrial capitalism.

The Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party The Populists originated in the cooperative crusade of the Farmers' Alliance, which began in Texas in the late 1870s. This crusade, in turn, built on the efforts of the Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, which for a decade had been promoting cooperative buying and selling across rural America. These cooperative efforts—stores, warehouses, insurance companies—sought to provide alternatives to the reviled middlemen and "furnishing merchants" who had a stranglehold over rural commerce. (See Chapter 1.) At its peak, the Farmers' Alliance claimed hundreds of thousands of members and supporters nationwide. Local chapters, or "suballiances," not only managed the thousands of cooperative enterprises, or "exchanges," but also helped members to recover stray animals and took vigilante action against thieves and ranchers who were greedy for grazing land. Headed by Charles Macune, the Alliance preached a simple message: "The Alliance is the people and the people are together."

Thousands of paid lecturers communicated this theme at local meetings, larger county gatherings, and massive Fourth of July encampments. Some were dynamic orators, such as "Sockless" Jerry Simpson of Kansas and Mary Elizabeth Lease, an activist in farmer, labor, and Irish nationalist circles and a brilliant speaker. Lease and her husband knew firsthand the difficulties of the farmer from a decade of struggling (and failing) to succeed on Kansas and Texas farms. Ironically, she became best known for declaring that farmers should "raise less corn and more hell"—a phrase that she apparently never uttered. The use of such profanity by a woman would have upset late-nineteenth-century audiences. When Lease spoke once of "the gates of hell," she had to explain to a shocked audience that she

Gift for the Grangers

This chromolithograph visually highlights the benefits of membership in the Grange, or Order of Patrons of Husbandry, an organization that was established in 1867 to assert the vital economic and social contributions of farmers. The movement culture of the Grangers gave pride of place to cultivation and cooperation in the fields and in the household. The celebration of agricultural manual labor at the center of the print is surrounded by scenes depicting the "Farmer's Fireside," a meeting of the "Grange in Session," a "Harvest Dance," and the biblical tale of "Ruth and Boaz" (in which Ruth's selfless harvest labor won the landowner's sympathy). Strobridge Lithography Company, *Gift for the Granger*, chromolithograph, 1873 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

was quoting the Bible. But if she was more decorous than history records, Lease still routinely made fiery speeches denouncing "a system which clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags."

About one-fourth of Alliance members were women—more in some suballiances. Women gave speeches, wrote for Alliance publications, and ran business affairs. Women's activity in the Alliance reflected their position in the family. Most joined along with their husbands or fathers (and as a result were not required to pay dues). Betty Munn Gay, an activist in the Texas Alliance and a woman's rights advocate, explained that female Alliance members joined as "the companion and helpmeet of man." But she also noted that women had a distinctive interest in the Alliance's reform program since "whenever poverty or misfortune overtakes the family," women "are the chief sufferers." Gay knew this firsthand: her husband's death in 1880 had left her with a mortgaged farm to manage. Still, she found time to participate in the Farmer's Alliance, the Baptist Church, and the Socialist Party.

Spurred by the depression, the Alliance spread like wildfire in the early 1880s. In 1883, the Texas Alliance supported twenty-six lecturers in eleven

". . . Monopoly Is the Master": A Populist Speech

The Populist leader Mary Elizabeth Lease held crowds of mid-western and southern farmers spellbound with her fiery oratory. In this selection from one of her many 1890 speeches to large audiences of Kansas farmers, Lease attacked the eastern moneyed interests, accusing them of dominating the lives of southern and western farmers.

This is a nation of inconsistencies. The Puritans fleeing from oppression became oppressors. We fought England for our liberty and put chains on four million of blacks. We wiped out slavery and our tariff laws and national banks began a system of white wage slavery worse than the first.

Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street.

The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East.

Money rules, and our Vice-President is a London banker. Our laws are the output of a system which clothes rascals in robes and honesty in rags.

The [political] parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us. . . . The politicians said we suffered from overproduction. Overproduction, when 10,000 little children, so statistics tell us, starve to death every year in the United States, and over 100,000 shopgirls in New York are forced to sell their virtue for the bread their niggardly wages deny them. . . .

We will stand by our homes and stay by our fireside by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the government pays its debts to us. The people are at bay; let the bloodhounds of money who dogged us thus far beware.

W. E. Connelley, ed., *History of Kansas, State and People* (1928).

counties, and by 1886, Texas membership had swelled to more than 100,000. Meeting in Waco in 1887, the Texas Alliance joined with farmers' groups from Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi and resolved to send lecturers throughout the cotton belt. Farmers greeted them enthusiastically. Texas Alliance lecturer J. B. Barry went back to his native state of North Carolina to organize. "I met the farmers twenty-seven times and twenty-seven times they organized," he wrote back excitedly. "The farmers seem like unto ripe fruit—you can gather them by a gentle shake of the bush."

Though the Alliance merged the interests of dirt farmers and large planters, it spoke primarily to those who owned land and marketed crops. It did not address the problems of the dispossessed, however much its rhetoric appealed to wage earners or landless rural people. Tenant farmers

". . . We Are Robbed of Our Means": A Farmer Protests the Railroads' Land Grab

This 1891 letter from a Minnesota farmer to Ignatius Donnelly, the popular author and champion of the agrarian cause, suggests the increasing desperation that drove plains farmers into taking collective action (punctuation and spelling corrected).

In the minds of the forlorn and the unprotected poor people of this and other states, I might say I am one of those poor and unprotected. . . . I settled on this land in good faith; built house and barn, broken up part of the land. Spent years of hard labor grubbing, fencing, and improving. Are they going to drive us out like trespassers . . . and give us away to the Corporations? How can they support them when we are robbed of our means? . . . We must decay and die from woe and sorrow. We are loyal citizens and do not intend to intrude on any Railroad Corporation. We believe and still do believe that the RR Co. has got no legal title to this land in question. We love our wives and children just as dearly as any of you. But how can we protect them, give them education as they should [get] when we are driven from sea to sea? . . .

Ignatius Donnelly Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, 1891.

had little cash for dues or literature and no produce to market cooperatively; what was more, they had to worry about antagonizing their landlords.

Most southern Alliance members opposed efforts to organize black farmers. Deeply racist and committed to the interests of landholders, they disliked sharecroppers and rural laborers. The Alliance therefore used its growing power to insist that other farmers' organizations drop black chapters when the organizations joined the Alliance. These racist attitudes weakened the movement of farmers, as it did that of labor.

Recognizing the potential of the Farmers' Alliance cooperative programs, however, black farmers organized similar groups. The Colored Farmers' National Alliance, which like the white Alliance emerged in Texas, claimed more than one million members by 1890. Its relationship with the white organization was various and changing, on both the national and local levels. Some white Alliance members accepted the black groups as they did black chapters of religious and fraternal organizations; others feared any organized black group and opposed them violently. In some places, black Alliance members created common cause with white ones by trading at Alliance stores, provoking white merchants to accuse the Alliance of stealing their business or of supplying black members with guns.

In 1889, members of the southern Alliance met in St. Louis with the smaller organization from the Great Plains. The groups did not merge, but they agreed on a platform that called for nationalizing the railroads, outlawing large landholding companies, abolishing national banks, and

Going to a Meeting
A rare photograph of a group of Populists near Dickinson City, Kansas, sometime during the 1890s. Kansas State Historical Society.

instituting a graduated income tax. Alliance leader Charles Macune introduced a plan that captured the imagination of farmers across the nation over the next few years. He proposed that the federal government create warehouses, or "subtreasuries," where farmers could store crops until prices climbed to acceptable levels. In return, they would receive loans, paid in certificates that would serve as money. In other words, the government would issue paper money and lend it to farmers, using their stored crops as collateral. The plan would replace and solidify, with government support, the Alliance's own cooperative efforts. If enacted, it would have challenged the control of banks and fostered inflation by helping farmers to pay back debts with cheaper money.

In 1890, the Alliance moved into electoral politics, capturing local Democratic parties in the Southwest. In the Plains states, Alliance members formed independent parties and campaigned extensively. Rural Kansas typically had open-air rallies of 25,000 people. Sixteen hundred wagons gathered for one meeting near Hastings, Nebraska. Such gatherings, in which farmers pulling up in their wagons could look back and see long trains of wagons converging on an encampment, forged the "movement culture" of populism. The movement seemed to transcend old sectional animosities, as it did on July 4, 1890, when North Carolina Alliance leader Leonidas Polk, who had fought with the Confederate Army, journeyed to Kansas, once a hotbed of Unionist sympathy. Speaking at an open-air rally of thousands of farmers, Polk declared, "I tell you that from New York to the Golden Gate the farmers have risen up and inaugurated a movement such as the world has never seen."

November's election results seemed to prove him right. In the South, the Alliance snared four governorships, eight state legislatures, and more

than forty seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. In Kansas, Alliance supporters won four-fifths of the seats in the state House of Representatives. In Nebraska, they allied with the Democrats to capture the governorship, and a young Democrat named William Jennings Bryan got himself elected to Congress by courting Populist votes. Buoyed by these successes, Alliance activists began to think seriously about launching a national political party. With a Republican president (Benjamin Harrison) and Senate and a Democratic House of Representatives, the national government seemed mired in stalemate while economic conditions deteriorated.

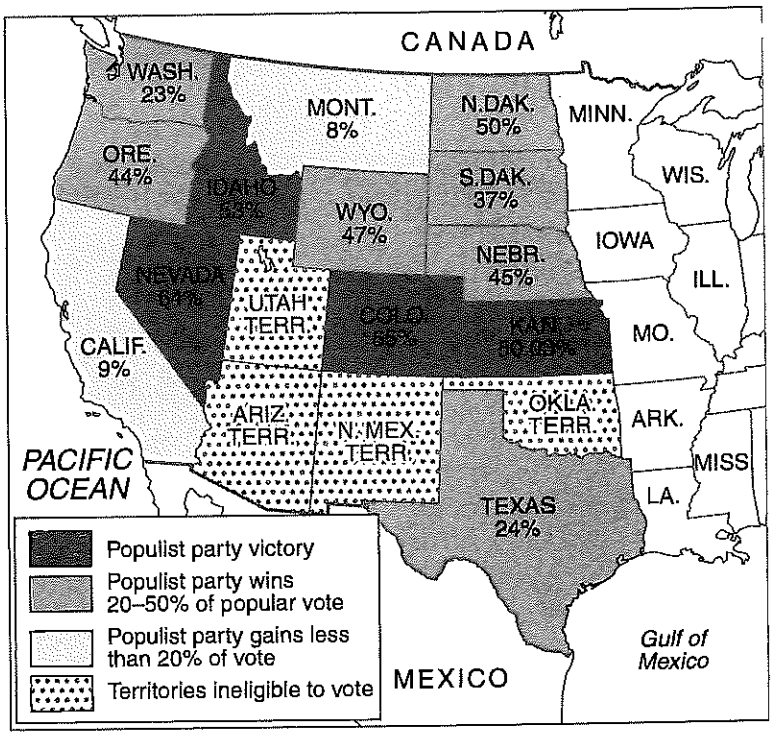
The Omaha Platform Although an agricultural depression weakened the Alliance in the South over the next two years, the movement continued to expand in the Midwest and the West. The People's Party held its first convention in July 1892, in Omaha, Nebraska. Thirteen hundred delegates adopted a platform that combined a biting attack on economic and social conditions with a hopeful call to action. "We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin," declared the preamble. "The fruits of toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the Republic and endanger liberty."

The Omaha Platform, as it was called, embodied a new and bold vision of the power and reach of the federal government. Some planks spoke directly to farmers. They called, for example, for "free" (unrestricted) coinage of silver, a scheme to help cash-poor farmers by increasing the amount of currency in circulation, for government ownership of railroads and telegraph lines, and for Macune's subtreasury system. Other planks had broader appeal: direct election of U.S. senators (who were then still elected by state legislatures); restriction of presidents to a single term; a graduated income tax in which the rich would pay a higher percentage than the poor; and the initiative and referendum, which enabled voters to initiate and enact laws, ensuring democratic participation in decision making on major issues. Calls for an eight-hour workday and for immigration restriction appealed to organized labor.

At its height, the Populists represented the largest and most powerful movement that had ever attempted to transform the American economic and political system and to curb the power of financiers and capitalists. The Populist platform spelled out a radical alternative to corporate capitalism, offering a vision of popular leadership and a democratic "cooperative commonwealth." This new vision sprang directly from the cooperative movement. The opposition that cooperatives had received from furnishing merchants, wholesalers, cotton buyers, grain elevator companies, and bankers had given Alliance members a new understanding of their

relationship with commercial elements of American society, spawning a culture of political revolt.

In the 1892 elections, Populists won more than one million votes and elected governors in Kansas and Colorado. Miners helped to put Populist Davis Waite into the Colorado governor's mansion, after which Colorado became one of the most prolabor states in the nation. Presidential candidate James B. Weaver (a former Union general whose presence on the ticket was balanced by running mate James G. Field, a former Confederate major who had lost a leg in battle) became the first third-party candidate since the Civil War to win any electoral votes, capturing Kansas, Colorado, Nevada, and Idaho as well as sharing in the electoral votes of North Dakota and Oregon (Map 3.1).



MAP 3.1 The Winning of the West: Populism in 1892
In the 1892 elections, the Populists became the first third party since the 1860s to capture any electoral votes. This map shows the percentage of the popular vote received by Populist presidential candidate James Weaver in the West, where he ran particularly strongly. At the same time, voters elected Populist governors in Kansas and Colorado.

Still, the more dramatic result of the 1892 elections was the triumph of the Democrats, who had already regained control of Congress two years before. Now they defeated incumbent Republican President Benjamin Harrison and returned to that office Grover Cleveland, who had won the presidency in 1884 and then had lost it to Harrison in 1888. Although Republicans dominated the presidency in the late nineteenth century, the nation was actually very closely divided between the two major parties, with small differences in the vote determining the outcome of elections. In these years, Republicans usually controlled the Senate and Democrats controlled the House, with few seats changing hands in any election.

The Cross of Gold By the time the stock market crashed in 1893, many labor activists were looking to electoral politics for solutions to some of the problems created by the rise of industrial capitalism. Populist successes made such political action look viable, despite a wide spectrum of opinion. While many working people were too angry and desperate to believe in the electoral process, their support for more militant action had diminished with the defeat of the 1892 Homestead steel strike.

Socialists in the labor movement urged the formation of an independent political movement, modeled on socialist parties in industrialized Europe. Calling trade unions "impotent," unable to "cope with the great power of concentrated wealth," socialists had persuaded the 1892 AFL convention to endorse two planks from the Populist platform: the initiative and referendum and federal ownership of telegraph and telephone lines. The

next year, in the midst of depression, the convention adopted the entire socialist political program, calling for nationalization of railroads and mines, the eight-hour workday, abolition of sweatshops, government inspection of mines and factories, and municipal ownership of public utilities.

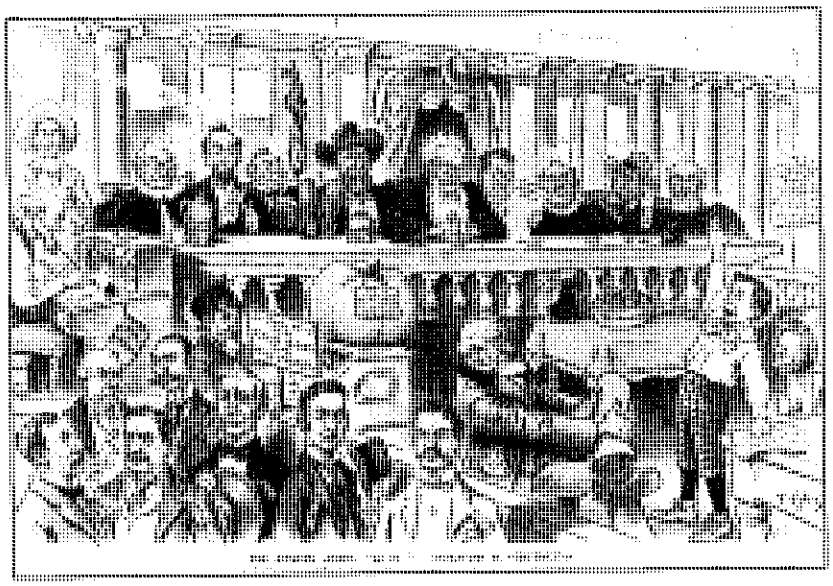
All over the country, labor activists got into politics during 1894. Two hundred trade unionists ran for political office. Populist leaders, too, had concluded that to grow, the party would have to attract urban workers and create an alliance of farmers and laborers. Though Samuel Gompers dismissed such an alliance as "unnatural," AFL members had long supported cooperation between poor workers and farmers. That cooperation emerged in Illinois, when Chicago labor leaders and downstate agrarian activists sought to overcome their ideological differences and launch a united Populist movement in the 1894 congressional elections.

On Election Day, many Illinois coal miners and railroad workers voted Populist. The party did well in Milwaukee, the Ohio Valley coal communities, and the Irish Catholic mining regions of the West. But the Republicans captured the most votes in workers' districts, in part because the Populists drew support away from the Democrats. Appealing to narrow economic interests and ethnic loyalties, Republicans won many workingmen over to the notion that a protective tariff on foreign goods was the key to "a full dinner pail" for all. In the biggest victory in the history of Congress, the Republicans gained 117 seats and became the clear-cut majority party. The 1894 elections had broken through the deadlock of two-party competition and stalemate that had dominated American politics since the Civil War.

Still, Republicans and Democrats had to take the Populists seriously. They had gained more than 1.5 million votes in 1894, half again the number they had received in 1892. To win back supporters, Democrats began selectively to endorse parts of the Populist program. In 1896, facing almost certain defeat, the Democratic rank and file moved to adopt one of the planks in the Populist platform: the call for free coinage of silver. This issue appealingly united the interests of miners (and even mine owners) with those of credit-starved farmers.

The free-silver issue had its roots in the years before 1873, when the U.S. Treasury had made both silver and gold into money, at a fixed ratio: 16 ounces of silver equaled one ounce of gold. The system worked until the price of silver rose on world markets. Then, with silver coins worth more than their face value, people melted them down, and the coins disappeared from circulation. In 1873, the government abandoned silver as a medium of exchange.

After prospectors discovered silver in Nevada and Arizona, its price fell dramatically on world markets in the spring of 1893. Hoping to prop up its value, hard-hit western mining interests pressed to resume the coinage of



The Supreme Court — as It May Hereafter Be Constituted

Puck presented an unabashedly cosmopolitan view of how the Supreme Court might appear if the Populists won the 1896 election. "Gold Bugs and Millionaires" huddle in a "waiting pen," their fate in the hands of nine justices who collectively embody the rustic "old geezer" stereotype: sporting unkempt goatees, their dress severe but informal, their behavior unsophisticated in its lack of ceremony. Frederick B. Opper, *Puck*, September 9, 1896 — New-York Historical Society.

silver at the old 16-to-1 ratio. Bringing silver back into the Treasury would also expand the supply of currency, which was in high demand for industrial and commercial purposes. Farmers joined the campaign to increase the money supply. Strapped with debt and vulnerable to falling cotton and grain prices, they wanted inflation, which would allow them to pay off their debts with cheaper dollars. Their creditors, on the other hand, supported "sound money," by which they meant gold.

The Populists' program went well beyond free silver. Indeed, some of the most prominent Populist leaders had argued against free silver at the 1892 Omaha convention. Congressman and Farmers' Alliance member Tom Watson of Georgia and urban social democrat Henry Demarest Lloyd both maintained that inflation would alienate wage earners and destroy the farmer-labor alliance. But prosilver sentiment ran deep in the country at large, especially after the Panic of 1893 and the sharp deflation that followed.

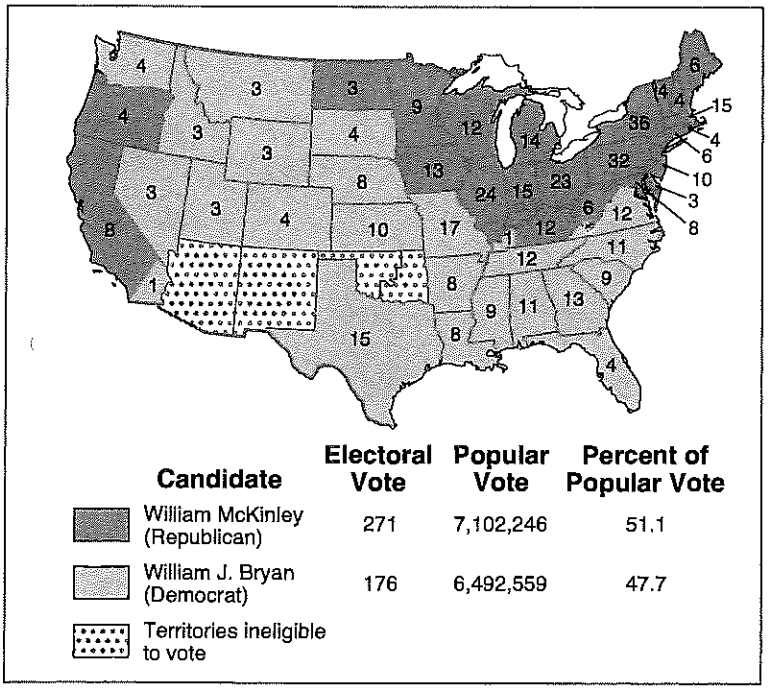
When silver prices plummeted during the spring of 1893, the American West felt the effect immediately. Mines closed, and owners cut wages in the few that remained open. Hundreds of thousands of people faced destitution in Colorado mining towns such as Aspen, where mine employment dropped from 2,500 to 150 within a week. Some places became ghost towns overnight; discontented idle miners gathered in others.

President Cleveland, a sound-money man, reacted to the crisis by persuading Congress to repeal an 1890 law requiring the government to purchase and coin silver. Meanwhile, gold reserves were being drained, partly by payments for foreign imports and partly because of a rash of redemptions by holders of treasury notes. To replenish the supply, in 1895, the president asked J. P. Morgan and a syndicate of private bankers to finance a purchase of gold. An outraged public saw Cleveland's action as a secret negotiation with Wall Street financiers.

At the 1896 convention, Democrats repudiated Cleveland and instead nominated William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska, the leader of the silver Democrats. The thirty-six-year-old Bryan's brilliant oratory transfixed the convention. Lashing out at Republican sound-money advocates, he declared, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold." Meeting soon afterward, the Populists endorsed Bryan, but for vice president they nominated Allianceman Tom Watson.

The Republicans put forth William McKinley of Ohio, an advocate of sound money. McKinley appealed to a middle class that was terrified of violent strikes and gun-toting bankrupt farmers. The campaign, one commentator remarked, "took the form of religious frenzy" as Republicans denounced Bryan as an anarchist and revolutionary. The *New York Times* even wrote an editorial declaring Bryan to be of "unsound mind" and endorsing the view of an "alienist" (as psychiatrists were then called) that the candidate was a "madman" and "paranoic reformer." McKinley won with 52 percent of the popular vote and 61 percent of the electoral college, the most lopsided margin in twenty-five years. Bryan ran strong in the South and the West, especially the silver-mining states (Map 3.2).

Republicans captured support from urban workingmen, especially white Protestant skilled workers in small and medium-sized midwestern cities. These men eyed the Democratic Party, dominated in the North by immigrants, Catholics, and unskilled workers, with growing suspicion and distaste. Many of them blamed the depression on President Cleveland and the Democrats, the party in power when the depression hit. The Republican

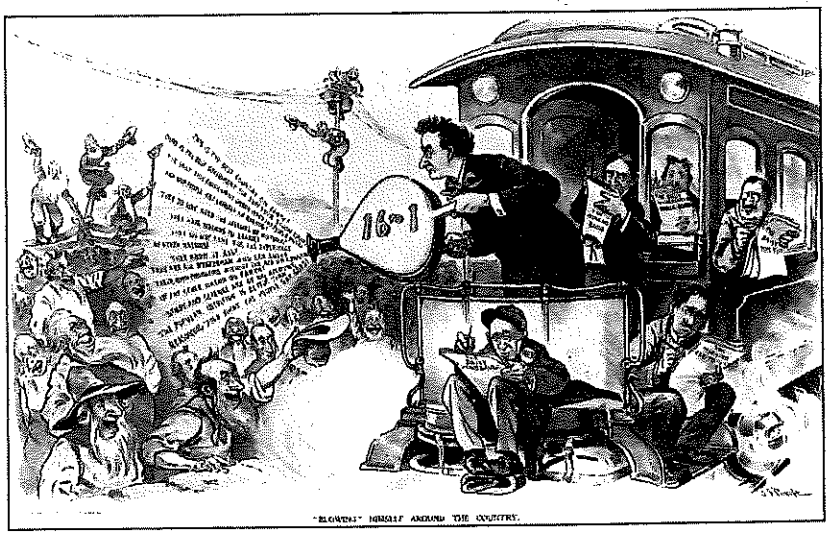


MAP 3.2 Crucified on a Cross of Gold? The Republican Triumph in 1896

Republican William McKinley won a decisive victory in 1896 by capturing the populous states of the Northeast and Midwest even while Democrat William Jennings Bryan carried the more rural South and West. The Republican victory in 1896 solidified that party's dominance in national politics, which would last until 1932.

program included a high protective tariff that was intended to protect American business and to ease unemployment.

The presidential election of 1896 gave the Republicans control of both the executive and legislative branches and marked the end of Populism. Controversy over the decision to emphasize silver and endorse "fusion" with Bryan and the Democrats soon tore the Populist movement apart. Some leaders vigorously dissented from what they saw as a wholesale desertion of the broad reforms the Populists had once endorsed. Although the People's Party would survive for twelve years, Populism and its hope of uniting the producing classes of town and country had died.



"Blowing" Himself Around the Country

In September 1896, this *Puck* cartoon derided William Jennings Bryan's candidacy, showing him pumping out political promises from a bellows marked "16 to 1" (the ratio of silver coinage to gold proposed by "soft money" reformers to ease the farm families' economic plight). But the cartoon's major target appears to be rank-and-file Populists, portrayed as gullible, whiskered, and ignorant. J. S. Pughe, *Puck*, September 16, 1896 — New-York Historical Society.

Racism Institutionalized and Challenged

Following his defeat in the 1896 election, Populist vice presidential candidate Tom Watson withdrew temporarily from politics. As an Alliianceman, he had urged white southern farmers to unite with black farmers. But Watson soon reemerged as an outspoken white supremacist, blaming African Americans for the Populists' defeat. In later years, he expanded his attacks to include Roman Catholics, Jews, and socialists. As Watson's case suggests, racism became entrenched in American politics and culture as the nineteenth century came to a close.

In the 1880s, Southern states passed numerous segregation laws, a practice that the Supreme Court endorsed. In the 1890s, these states began to systematically disenfranchise black citizens. A horrifying wave of lynchings swept across the South (Figure 3.1). Some black leaders fought back against the racist tide, but others preached accommodation. Immigrants, especially those now coming from Eastern and Southern Europe, also confronted deep-seated prejudice from white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who viewed the newcomers as members of an inferior race. These views fueled the rise of nativist movements and efforts to restrict immigration.

Jim Crow Segregation and the Black Response A generation of African Americans had now been born and raised in freedom, with hopes and expectations appropriate to free people. Nonetheless, de facto segregation (segregation by social custom) had long dominated the South; schools, poorhouses, cemeteries, trains, and boats were all segregated. In the late 1880s, a coalition of planters, urban elites, and Populists began to pass state

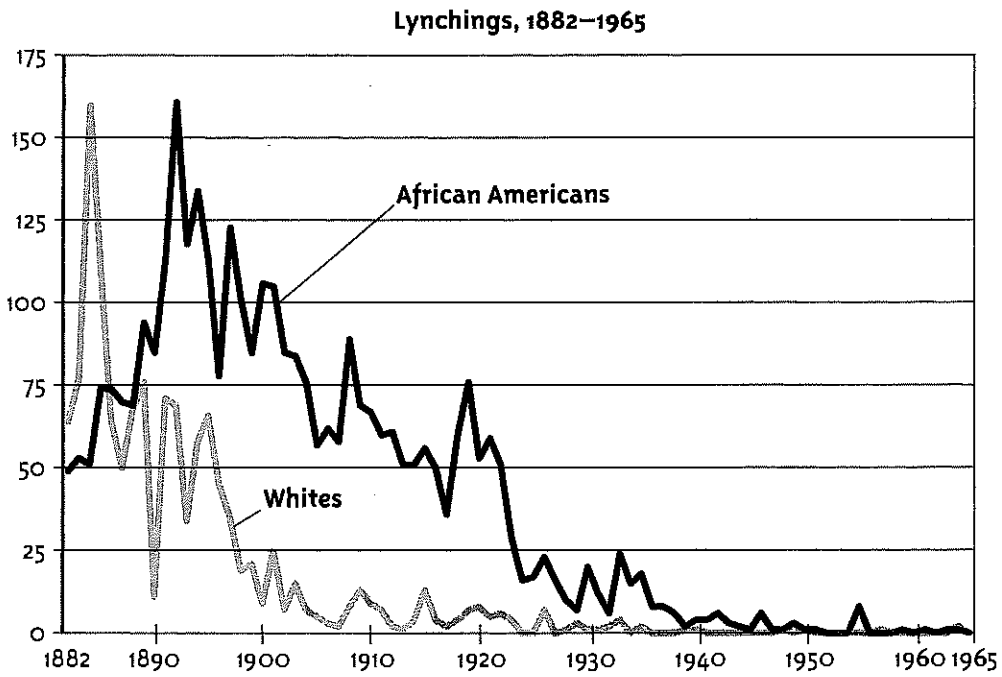
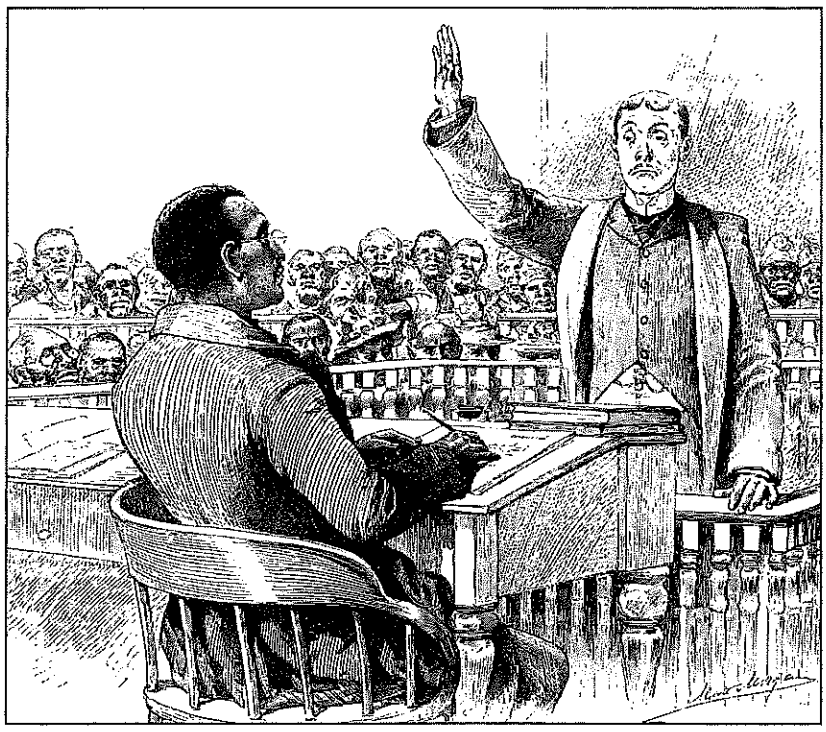


FIGURE 3.1 In Black and White: Eighty Years of Lynching
This graph illustrates the nearly five thousand deaths by lynching (broken down by race) that were officially recorded in the United States between 1882 and 1965. Lynchings of African Americans were at their worst in the 1890s, but the annual numbers remained high in the early twentieth century.

and local laws codifying such customs. Thus began de jure segregation (segregation mandated by law).

Black people launched numerous legal challenges. Homer Plessy, who refused to sit in a segregated railroad car, took his case to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* the justices affirmed segregation, upholding the Louisiana statute that mandated separate railroad cars for white and black passengers and enshrining in law the constitutionality of "separate but equal" public facilities. Only one justice, John Marshall Harlan, dissented. "The thin guise of 'equal' accommodations," Harlan wrote, "will not mislead anyone, or atone for the wrong this day done." The historic decision was not overturned until 1954.

The *Plessy* decision opened the way for even more restrictive racial legislation. It cemented the imposition of "Jim Crow" laws, a system of racial discrimination, segregation of public facilities, and political disfranchisement that was enforced with terror and violence in the 1890s. (The term *Jim Crow* seems to have originated in a song-and-dance routine first performed by a blackface minstrel in the 1830s.) Industrial employers



Justice of the Peace
After the collapse of Reconstruction, some African Americans in the South continued to hold local elective positions, particularly those of sheriffs and judges. This 1889 engraving shows a black justice of the peace presiding over a Jacksonville, Florida, police court. Matthew Somerville Morgan, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 23, 1889 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

". . . Our Condition Is Precarious in the Extreme": A Plea to Stop Lynchings

The Reverend E. Malcolm Argyle of Arkansas describes the intensity of racist violence against African Americans during the 1890s and cries out for help. This report was printed in Philadelphia's Christian Recorder *on March 24, 1892.*

There is much uneasiness and unrest all over this State among our people, owing to the fact that [black] people all over the State are being lynched upon the slightest provocation. . . . In the last 30 days there have been not less than eight colored persons lynched in this State. At Texarkana a few days ago, a man was burnt at the stake. In Pine Bluff a few days later two men were strung up and shot. . . . At Varner, George Harris was taken from jail and shot for killing a white man, for poisoning his domestic happiness. At Wilmar, a boy was induced to confess to the commission of an outrage, upon promise of his liberty, and when he had confessed, he was strung up and shot. Over in Toneoke County, a whole family consisting of husband, wife and child were shot down like dogs. Verily the situation is alarming in the extreme.

At this writing 500 people are hovering upon wharves in Pine Bluff, awaiting the steamers to take them up the Arkansas River to Oklahoma. . . . What is the outcome of all this? It is evident that the white people of the South have no further use for the Negro. He is being worse treated now, than at any other time, since the [Confederate] surrender. The white press of the South seems to be subsidized by this lawless element, the white pulpits seem to condone lynching. . . . The Northern press seems to care little about the condition of the Negroes [in the] South. The pulpits of the North are passive. Will not some who are not in danger of their lives, speak out against the tyrannical South . . . speak out against these lynchings and mob violence? For God's sake, say or do something, for our condition is precarious in the extreme.

Christian Recorder (Philadelphia), March 24, 1892. Reprinted in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, vol. 2 (1970), 793–794.

extended Jim Crow to the job site, where it undercut the possibilities of labor solidarity by segregating black and white workers, offering privileges to one group and denying them to the other.

Disfranchising black men helped to enact and safeguard segregation. Many social and economic setbacks had followed the end of Reconstruction, but black men still retained their right to participate in politics in much of the South. Some even held elective office. In the 1890s, southern planters, industrialists, and merchants moved decisively to eliminate black

"The Colored Citizens Desire . . . That Some Action Be Taken": Ida B. Wells-Barnett's Antilynching Campaign

Tennessee newspaper editor Ida B. Wells-Barnett was the leader in a national effort to get the federal government to stop lynchings of African Americans. Despite her unstinting efforts, she never succeeded in securing a federal antilynching law before her death in 1931. In the following 1898 petition to President William McKinley, Wells-Barnett, accompanied by the Chicago delegation of Illinois congressmen, protested the lynching of a South Carolina African American postmaster. The federal government took no action.

Mr. President, the colored citizens of this country in general, and Chicago in particular, desire to respectfully urge that some action be taken by you as chief magistrate of this great nation, first for the apprehension and punishment of the lynchers of Postmaster Baker, of Lake City, S.C.; second, we ask indemnity for the widow and children, both for the murder of the husband and father, and for injuries sustained by themselves; third, we most earnestly desire that national legislation be enacted for the suppression of the national crime of lynching.

For nearly twenty years lynching crimes, which stand side by side with Armenian and Cuban outrages, have been committed and permitted by this Christian nation. Nowhere in the civilized world save the United States of America do men, possessing all civil and political power, go out in bands of 50 and 5,000 to hunt down, shoot, hang or burn to death a single individual, unarmed and absolutely powerless. Statistics show that nearly 10,000 American citizens have been lynched in the past 20 years. To our appeals for justice the stereotyped reply has been that the government could not interfere in a state matter. Postmaster Baker's case was a federal matter, pure and simple. He died at his post of duty in defense of his country's honor, as truly as did ever a soldier on the field of battle. We refuse to believe this country, so powerful to defend its citizens abroad, is unable to protect its citizens at home. Italy and China have been indemnified by this government for the lynching of their citizens. We ask that the government do as much for its own.

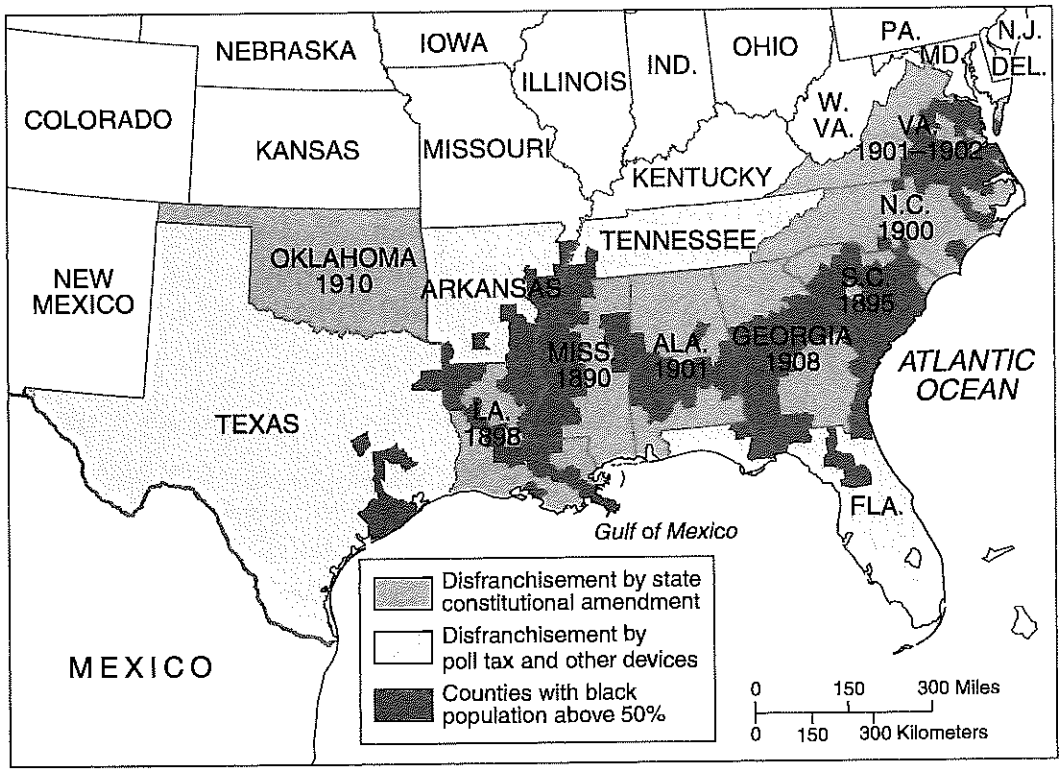
Cleveland Gazette, April 9, 1898. Reprinted in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, vol. 2 (1970), 798.

men from the political process. To consolidate their power, these southern leaders also disfranchised the poorest whites, who were prone to agrarian radicalism.

Beginning in Mississippi in 1890, southern governments imposed residency requirements, poll taxes, and literacy tests that disenfranchised black and, to a lesser extent, poor white voters. (Northern states also used literacy tests to disfranchise citizens born abroad.) South Carolina adopted Mississippi's formula in 1895; over the next twelve years, the remaining southern states followed suit. When someone pointed out that Virginia's

constitutional convention was engaged in discrimination, future U.S. senator Carter Glass replied bluntly, "Discrimination! Why, that is precisely what we propose; that, exactly, is what this convention was elected for." Cities such as Wilmington, North Carolina, where African Americans and Populists joined forces to win elections, experienced the brutal consequences of resisting the return to white supremacy. A white mob organized by the Democratic Party leaders led a violent coup d'etat in 1898 that replaced the city's elected officials, destroyed the African American newspaper office, and drove hundred of African Americans out of town. Soon, little room remained for black men in the South to exercise the rights they had won a generation earlier (Map 3.3).

Northern political and business leaders acquiesced in these developments. As late as 1889, Republican leaders such as Henry Cabot Lodge, a leader in the anti-immigrant campaign, had supported African American voting rights because black votes sustained the southern GOP. But the sweeping Republican victory of 1896 removed that motivation. The Repub-



MAP 3.3 Disfranchisement in the New South

From 1890 to 1910, eight states across the South passed amendments to their state constitutions to disfranchise African Americans. These states had significant areas where African Americans were the majority. Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Florida achieved the same ends through prohibitively high poll taxes, effectively denying African Americans in the South the right to vote.

Antilynching Crusader with the Family of a Lynching Victim

In 1892, Memphis, Tennessee, newspaper editor Ida B. Wells-Barnett revealed the role of local white businessmen in the lynching of three black competitors. She is shown here standing with Betsy Moss and her two children, the widow and orphans of Memphis grocer Tom Moss, one of the murdered black businessmen. A white mob destroyed Wells's office, and she was forced to flee north, where her public lectures and writing brought lynchings to national attention. W. F. Griffin — Special Collections, University of Chicago Library.

lican Party, which had been a channel of political activity for African American men for three decades, was effectively closed to them. With the Populists' electoral defeat and retreat into racism, the limited possibilities of Populism also faded.

Racism enhanced the Democrats' strength in the South. Although national elections went to the Republicans, disfranchisement of black southerners had effectively defused the regional Republican and the Populist threats, and by 1900, the South regularly voted Democratic. Racist ideology played an important role in ensuring this outcome, and violence and brutal terrorism reinforced it. Local officials felt no obligation to protect those who could not vote, hold public office, or serve on juries, and the federal government no longer oversaw black southerners' constitutional rights. White mobs, serving as prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner, tortured

and murdered black men for alleged wrongdoings or the "crime" of prospering economically under the reign of Jim Crow. In the 1880s and 1890s, white Southerners lynched more than 100 African Americans each year. They used lynching not only as a ritual of social control, but also as recreation; families brought their children, and mobs dispensed body parts as souvenirs.

Led by journalist and lecturer Ida B. Wells-Barnett, African Americans formed a national antilynching movement to protest the wave of violence. "Nowhere in the civilized world save the United States of America," Wells-Barnett wrote in a petition to President McKinley protesting the lynching of a black South Carolina postmaster, "do men . . . go out in bands of 50 and 5,000 to hunt down, shoot, hang or burn to death a single individual, unarmed and absolutely powerless." She exposed the myth that most lynchings defended white womanhood and instead emphasized white men's fear of economic competition from blacks. Local whites had killed the South Carolina postmaster because his recent appointment to the federal post enraged them; when his wife, their baby in her arms, sought to comfort her dying husband, another bullet crashed through the infant's skull.

Wells-Barnett was the most visible of the many black women who assumed a growing role in the public sphere after black men lost their rights. After their husbands, brothers, and sons were disfranchised, black women whose political skills had been nurtured in churches, temperance organizations, and Republican Party auxiliaries developed the ideology, political strategies, and organizational structure to carry on. African American women emerged as the "diplomats" to the white community.

The single most influential black leader, however, was a man: Booker T. Washington. Born a slave in 1858, Washington had worked as a laborer and domestic servant after the Civil War, eventually fulfilling his dream of attending Virginia's Hampton Institute. In 1881, he founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and modeled it on Hampton's industrial education program. The school trained African Americans to work with their hands, on the theory that market economics discriminated between the trained and the untrained rather than between black and white. Tuskegee eventually attracted support from the richest white people in America, including Andrew Carnegie.

Washington asserted that black people should accommodate themselves to white power. "Cast down your buckets where you are," he urged them in his famous 1895 Atlanta Exposition Address. "In all things that are purely social," he reassured white Americans, "we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Washington's accommodationist language appealed to white politicians

and businessmen eager to roll back black voting rights and secure a docile labor force. His relationships with the white political and economic elite gave him the opportunity to work behind the scenes to influence politics and the power to dispense money and patronage jobs to African Americans—power he preserved ruthlessly and sometimes duplicitously.

Washington's most significant black adversary was W. E. B. DuBois, the preeminent African American intellectual of the twentieth century. The terms of their debate reflected the inherent tension between capitalism and democracy. DuBois attacked Washington's Atlanta speech, accusing Washington of accepting segregation and forsaking political rights to obtain economic goals. But Washington actually supported some direct challenges to segregation and even cooperated secretly with DuBois on a test of Tennessee's Jim Crow law.

The New Immigrants In the South, segregation and political disfranchisement confined African Americans to the lowest-paying jobs. In the crowded cities of the Northeast and Midwest, newly arrived Slavic and Italian immigrants tended to hold those less-skilled positions. Established immigrants and their American-born children had plenty of opportunity to move into the ranks of foremen and skilled laborers. Because they spoke English, they could also get the new clerical, sales, and managerial jobs. Unskilled and semiskilled workers typically earned less than half what skilled workers received. Skilled and less-skilled workers lived differently, fought separately for their rights, and had distinctly different relationships with their employers.

As in the past, the new immigrants were fleeing economic and political turmoil. Rapid population growth had put tremendous pressure on European peasant economies, and sons were inheriting ever-smaller plots of farmland. New technologies had cheapened shipping, which meant that European farmers faced competition from Canada, the United States, and Argentina. Peasants who lost their farms fell into the ranks of agricultural and urban wage laborers.

Eastern European Jews faced different problems. Living in crowded towns on the western edge of the Russian Empire, they were legally prohibited from owning land; most engaged in trade or artisan labor. Industrialization was undermining their traditional ways of life, and anti-Semitism made them scapegoats for the region's economic problems.

As change swept Eastern and Southern Europe, some displaced farmers and workers responded with protests, but millions of other individuals found emigration a more sensible option. Janos Kovacs, a Hungarian peasant who could "earn only enough for bread and water," concluded

"I Am Obliged to Reside in America": A Gay Immigrant Tells His Story in 1882

The reasons immigrants had for leaving their homelands and coming to America were as diverse as the backgrounds of the immigrants themselves. Although most immigrants came to the United States for economic reasons some sought a new home because of persecution based on their politics, their religious beliefs, or even their sexual orientation. In this 1882 letter sent to medical writer and sexologist Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a thirty-eight-year-old German-born merchant explained how a homosexual arrest in his homeland forced him to emigrate to the United States.

Until I was twenty-eight years old I had no suspicion that there were others constituted like myself. One evening in the castle garden at X, where, as I subsequently found, those constituted like myself were accustomed to seek and find each other, I met a man who powerfully excited my sexual feelings, so much so that I had a seminal emission. . . .

I know of a case in Geneva where an admirable attachment between two men like myself has existed for seven years. If it were possible to have a pledge of such a love they might well make pretensions to marriage. . . . One thing is true. Our loves bear as fair and noble flowers incite to as praiseworthy efforts as does the love of man for the woman of his affections. There are the same sacrifices, the same joy in abnegation even to the laying down of life, the same pain, the same joy, sorrow, happiness, as with men of ordinary natures. . . .

In consequence of the disgrace which came upon me in my fatherland I am obliged to reside in America. Even now I am in constant anxiety lest what befell me at home should be discovered here and thus deprive me of the respect of my fellow-men.

Richard Von Krafft-Ebing, "Perversion of the Sexual Instinct? Report of Cases," trans. H. M. Jewett, *Alienist and Neurologist* (St. Louis, Missouri), vol. 9, no. 4 (Oct. 1888). Reprinted in *American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, ed. Jonathan Katz (New York: Avon Books, 1976), 59–60.

"there was but one hope, America." Other peasants and workers moved to Canada, Argentina, Australia, and the more prosperous industrial regions of Europe.

The vast majority of emigrants were young. Italian and Slavic men left home without their families, hoping to earn enough money to return to their homelands and marry, buy land, or set up small businesses. Many actually did so, especially Italians. Jews, who were fleeing religious and legal persecution as well as economic adversity, usually came in family groups and seldom returned to their homelands.

Although immigrants' reasons for coming to America in the 1880s and 1890s resembled those of earlier decades, these newcomers faced greater

Mug Shot

A police department arrest record reflects the faith in data and science espoused by some reformers. The reputedly scientific measurements instituted by French anthropologist Alphonse Bertillon claimed to use physical evidence to detect innate criminality and other character flaws, many associated with particular ethnic and racial groups. American Social History Project.

Detective Bureau No. 6456

POLICE DEPARTMENT

CITY OF NEW YORK.

Bertillon Measurements.

Height, 173.4	Head length, 18.2		L. foot, 25.1+
Outer Arms, 174.0	Head width, 14.7+		Mid. f. 11.5
Trunk, 90.5	R. Ear.	Length, 5.8+	Lit. f. 9.2
			Fore A, 46.4

Name [illegible]

Alias

Crime [illegible]

Age 26 Height 5 Ft. 8½ In.

Weight 134 Build [illegible]

Hair [illegible] Eyes [illegible]

Complexion [illegible] Mustache

Born

Occupation [illegible]

Date of Arrest [illegible]

Officer [illegible]

Remarks [illegible]

[illegible]

prejudice than had all earlier groups except the Irish and the Chinese. Like the Irish in the 1840s and 1850s, these people were the poorest and least assimilated of the new Americans, and they became targets of nativist, anti-immigrant sentiment. And unlike many earlier immigrants, who were Protestant, most of the new immigrants were Catholic or Jewish, and few spoke English. Because their agricultural and handcraft skills had little value in a rapidly advancing industrial economy, they entered the workforce as unskilled or semiskilled laborers.

The new immigrants also encountered racism. The old elites—white, Protestant, English speaking—regarded them as members of an inferior race and warned that WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) were committing "race suicide" by having fewer children than the newcomers. Journalists and politicians equated the physical characteristics of different national groups with mental and moral qualities. Phrases such as "the Hebrew race" or "the Slavic races" appeared routinely in popular journalism. "You don't call . . . an Italian a white man?" a Congressman asked a West Coast construction boss at a hearing. "No, sir," was the reply, "an Italian is a Dago." White Southerners lynched Jews, Italians, and other immigrants, albeit much less frequently than African Americans.

Nativism and Immigration Restriction The 1890s saw a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, which had many sources. Nativists played on fears of violence and of the diversity of thought, belief, and custom represented by Europeans. Reformers blamed immigrants for municipal corruption. Workingmen's organizations claimed that immigrants kept wages low. Militant Protestants called Catholic immigrants pawns of Romanism. The popular press blamed them for political turmoil. Even those who sympathized with immigrants condemned them for their poverty and their peasant habits.

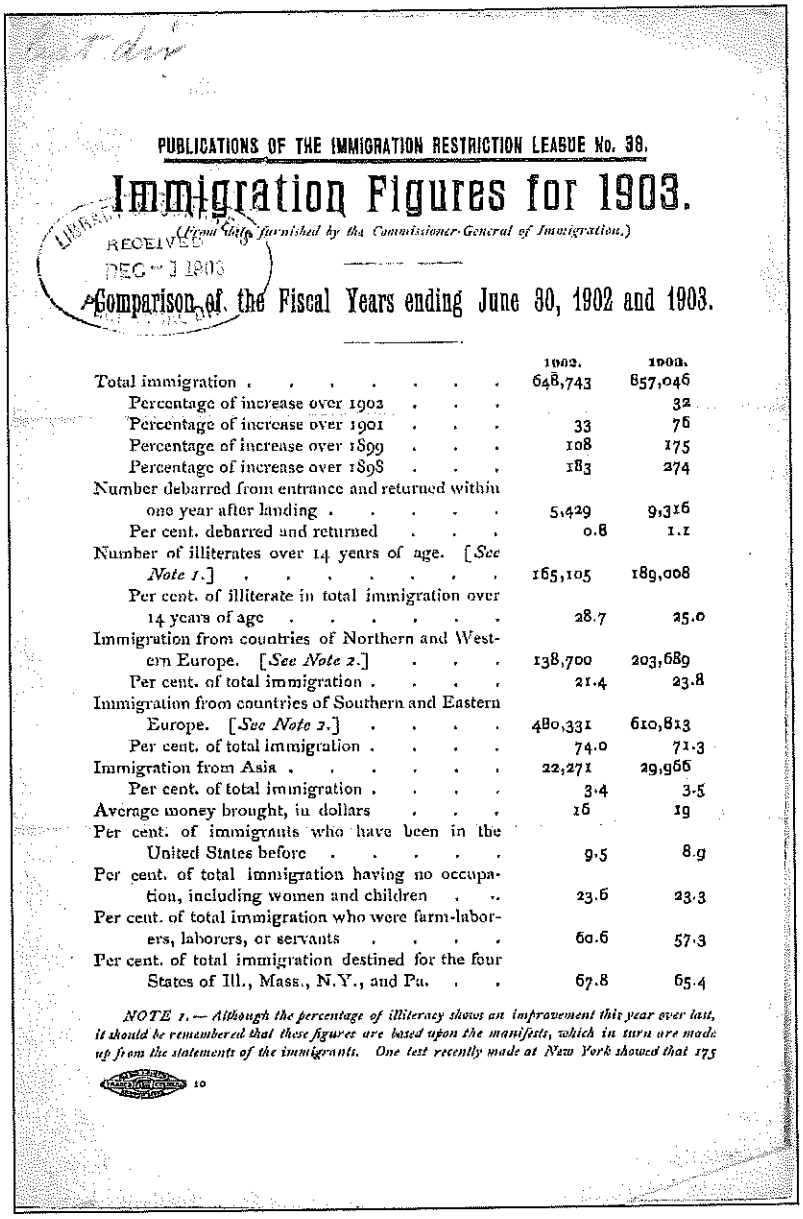
The perceived threat of foreign-born radicals also fed nativism. Seven of the eight accused conspirators in the Haymarket affair of 1886 were immigrants. In response, the press spouted nativist rhetoric, and anti-immigrant groups formed across the country. Three weeks after Haymarket, a railroad attorney organized the American Party in California, declaring that Americans must exclude "the restless revolutionary horde of foreigners who are now seeking our shores from every part of the world."

The United States had restricted immigration for the first time in 1882, through the Chinese Exclusion Act and a law denying entrance to paupers and convicts. In 1891, a new immigration law gave the federal government complete authority over immigration and created national administrative mechanisms for its control. The law made it illegal for employers to advertise abroad for workers, and it excluded people with contagious diseases. It created provisions for expelling undesirable aliens, requiring that steamship companies return rejected immigrants to Europe. On January 1, 1892, the

Charting the "Undesirable Races"

A publication distributed by the Immigration Restriction League graphically demonstrates the rise in the proportion of immigrants from "less desirable races of Southern and Eastern Europe." The League was alarmed by the ways "new immigrants" differed from previous newcomers in the categories of illiteracy, lack of money and occupation, and the tendency to gather in crowded cities. The League relied on pseudo-scientific evidence to bolster its claims.

Publications of the Immigration Restriction League, No. 38 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



PUBLICATIONS OF THE IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION LEAGUE No. 38.

Immigration Figures for 1903.

(From data furnished by the Commissioner-General of Immigration.)

Comparison of the Fiscal Years ending June 30, 1902 and 1903.

	1902.	1903.
Total immigration	648,743	857,046
Percentage of increase over 1902		32
Percentage of increase over 1901	33	76
Percentage of increase over 1899	108	175
Percentage of increase over 1898	183	274
Number debarred from entrance and returned within one year after landing	5,429	9,316
Per cent. debarred and returned	0.8	1.1
Number of illiterates over 14 years of age. [*See Note 1.*]	165,105	189,008
Per cent. of illiterate in total immigration over 14 years of age	28.7	25.0
Immigration from countries of Northern and Western Europe. [*See Note 2.*]	138,700	203,689
Per cent. of total immigration	21.4	23.8
Immigration from countries of Southern and Eastern Europe. [*See Note 2.*]	480,331	610,813
Per cent. of total immigration	74.0	71.3
Immigration from Asia	22,271	29,966
Per cent. of total immigration	3.4	3.5
Average money brought, in dollars	16	19
Per cent. of immigrants who have been in the United States before	9.5	8.9
Per cent. of total immigration having no occupation, including women and children	23.6	23.3
Per cent. of total immigration who were farm-laborers, laborers, or servants	60.6	57.3
Per cent. of total immigration destined for the four States of Ill., Mass., N.Y., and Pa.	67.8	65.4

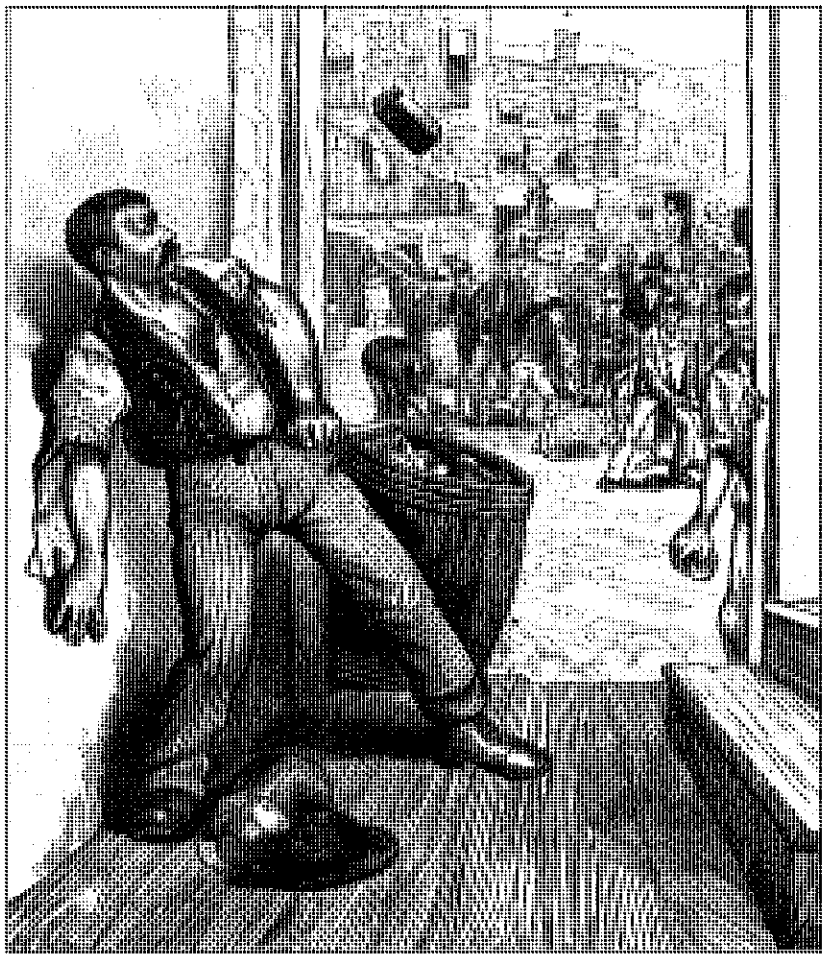
NOTE 1.— Although the percentage of illiteracy shows an improvement this year over last, it should be remembered that these figures are based upon the manifests, which in turn are made up from the statements of the immigrants. One test recently made at New York showed that 175

10

Ellis Island immigration depot opened. Medical inspections were performed there, but only for steerage passengers; those who paid for first- or second-class passage received perfunctory inspections in their cabins.

American nativism often took the form of anti-Catholicism. In 1887, the American Protective Association (APA) organized to drive Irish Catholics out of American politics and soon claimed a half-million members, all of whom took an oath never to vote for a Catholic. The APA explicitly blamed the depression on Catholics, asserting that immigrants had taken the jobs of native-born Americans.

Immigration restriction was one highlight of the Republican platform of 1896, which called for laws to exclude those who could not pass a literacy test in their native language. Such tests would discriminate against peasants



At Bay

A newspaper engraving depicts an attack on an Italian strikebreaker during the 1882 New York freight handlers' strike. Although shown as a victim, the Italian's "exotic" dress and earring marked him as an outsider to contemporary readers. A. B. Shults, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 5, 1882 — American Social History Project.

from Eastern and Southern Europe. Restrictive laws, the platform claimed, would protect the United States by defending American citizenship and "the wages of our workingmen against the fatal competition of low-price labor."

The Immigration Restriction League, a forum for nativism founded in 1893 by a group of Harvard graduates from old Boston families, had advanced the idea of a literacy test. For them, the flood of foreign poor dramatized and symbolized the problems raised by the expanding urban working class. The League drew a line between "old" and "new" foreigners. Like many other native-born Americans, its members regarded the new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe as racially distinct from old-stock Anglo-Saxons. This distinction became the linchpin of the anti-immigration crusade.

Most advocates of restriction were Republicans, but nativism and nativist racism permeated all corners of American politics. Populists incorporated anti-Semitism in their rhetoric, and labor activists, seeking an explanation for the sudden sharp drop in their fortunes, embraced anti-immigrant ideas. On the Pacific Coast, labor organizations had long advocated immigration restriction. Building on white workers' fears of competition from Chinese immigrants, they lobbied actively for extension

of the Chinese Exclusion Act when it came up for congressional renewal in 1892.

Employers were divided over immigration restriction. Before the depression, many businessmen had supported free immigration, although not necessarily out of tolerance or belief in a free market. New York's *Journal of Commerce* argued nakedly in 1892 that people, like cows, were expensive to produce; immigration represented a gift of a costly commodity. But the belief that immigrants brought labor strife, violence, and radicalism sometimes counterbalanced the desire for a cheap and steady labor supply. The *New York Tribune* called "Huns" (Hungarians and Slavs) the most dangerous of labor unionists and strikers: "They fill up with liquor and cannot be reasoned with."

Territorial and Economic Expansion

Strident nationalism and racism intensified into warmongering in the late 1890s, prompting America's entry into overseas adventures. In 1898, the United States gained its first real overseas empire as the result of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, winning control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Filipinos did not, however, acquiesce to American rule and fought a bloody (but unsuccessful) war against the United States. Some American anti-imperialists challenged this expansionist turn in American foreign policy.

But global economic expansion became the order of the day. Some industrialists responded to the 1893 panic by searching for new markets. And as American business recovered from the mid-1890s depression, it became not just more international, but also increasingly organized into giant corporations, the product of a frenzy of mergers. Initially, the AFL-affiliated craft unions also benefited from the economic recovery. But the new century brought a renewed corporate offensive against the labor movement.

The Ideology of Expansion At the 1893 Columbian Exposition, historian Frederick Jackson Turner had famously proclaimed that the once great American frontier was now closed. Later historians would dispute his influential "frontier thesis," pointing out that the West had never been an empty and uncivilized frontier and that it still had much unoccupied land at the end of the century. But contemporaries embraced his analysis and argued that America would now need to look abroad for natural resources and economic expansion.

Around the same time, patriotism, once linked to egalitarian ideas of republican virtue, grew aggressive and jingoistic. New organizations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution promoted new forms of

patriotism, such as a cult of the American flag, now saluted each morning in schools. Some conservatives championed war as the highest form of patriotism and a way of channeling the unrest of the depression years.

Many business, agricultural, and political leaders argued that to secure the nation's economic interests and absorb its surplus production, the United States should expand overseas and win access to international markets as well as resources. "We are raising more than we can consume," avowed Indiana Senator Albert J. Beveridge. "We are making more than we can use. Therefore, we must find new markets for our products, new occupations for our capital, new work for our labor." Recovery from the depression of the 1890s was achieved in part by Americans doing business in other countries, and by 1896, the nation's exports had begun to exceed its imports. American businesses also bought supplies and opened factories abroad. Singer sold sewing machines around the world—machines made in Scotland and Russia as well as New Jersey. International Harvester operated factories in six countries.

American companies attempting to expand abroad did not have some of the advantages of their counterparts in Britain, France, and Germany, which were carving out colonial empires in Asia and Africa. Such overseas empires—composed of countries administered by the mother country—extended the colonizers' political and military clout, giving their businesses special investment and marketing opportunities. Some Americans believed that colonies offered the United States the best chance to enter overseas markets. The nation's previous expansion, they noted, had entailed military conflict on the North American continent—with American Indians and, in the 1840s, with Mexico. Now, idealistic and convinced of their own racial superiority, some Americans were willing to risk further military conflict to follow the example of leading European nations. Such militaristic impulses were fostered by the widespread belief that going to war would bolster American "manhood," a quality that was seen as central to the political system.

The Spanish-Cuban-American War In 1898, proponents of overseas expansion got their chance when the United States entered the Spanish-Cuban-American War, a "splendid little war," in the words of Secretary of State John Hay. The immediate issue was Cuba's ongoing struggle for independence from Spain, 90 miles off the Florida coast. In 1895, Cuban guerrillas resumed their rebellion against Spanish rule and solicited popular sympathy and financial support in the United States. Sensationalized newspaper reports of the brutality of Spanish soldiers toward Cuban civilians fed popular support for U.S. involvement. In New York, William Randolph Hearst's *Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *World* competed for circulation by detailing Spanish atrocities. These papers and their imitators—

Competing for Readers

U.S. newspapers headlined stories about Spanish atrocities in Cuba and pressed for U.S. intervention. The papers often reported rumors as facts; the *New York Journal*, for example, distorted an incident involving a search of a Cuban woman by Spanish agents. The illustration showed what amounted to a sexual assault, but the event as pictured never occurred. Frederic Remington, *New York Journal* — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

The Spanish Brute Adds Mutilation to Murder

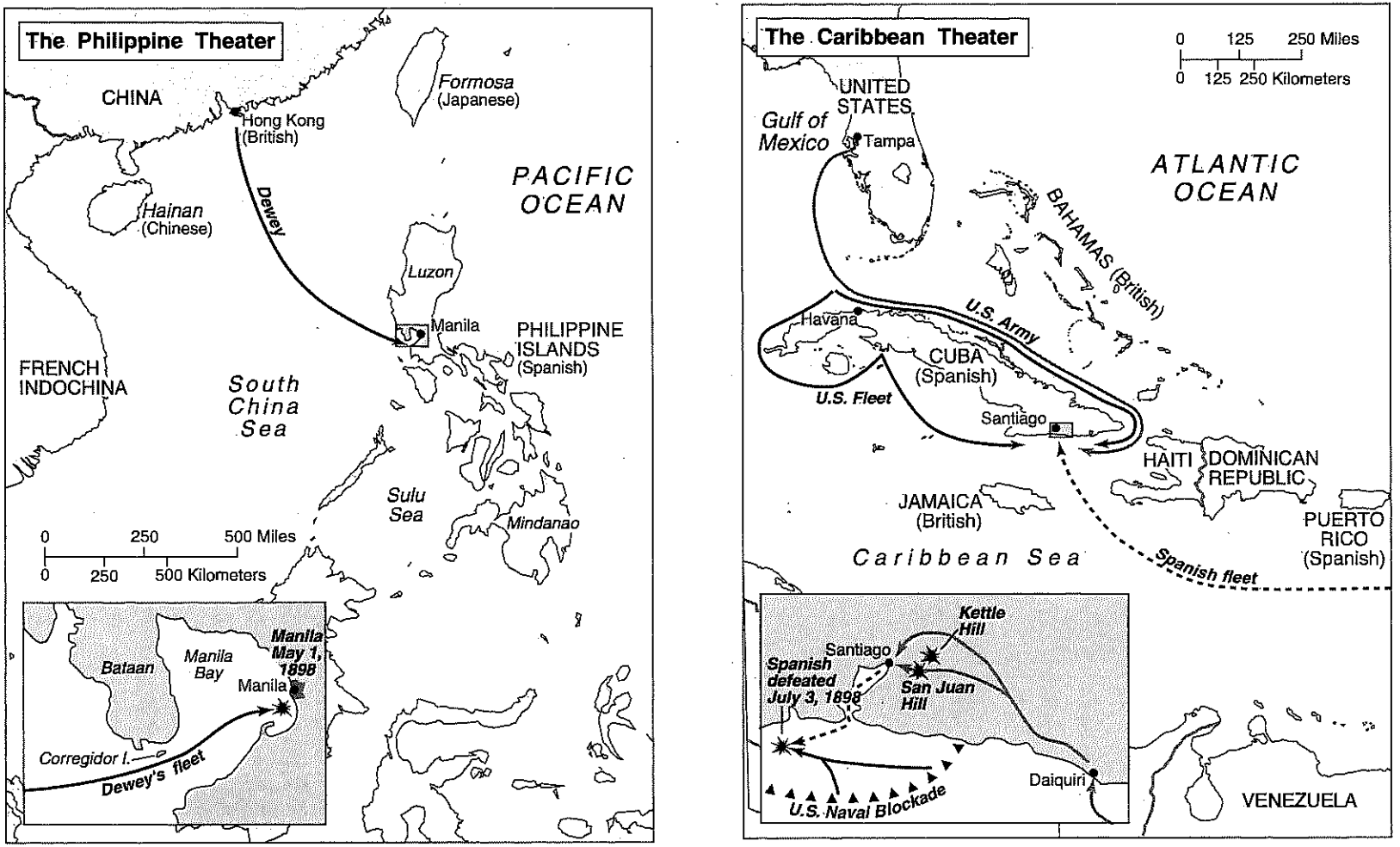
Grant Hamilton's bestial Spaniard, bespattered by American blood, typifies how the U.S. press sensationalized news coverage and exploited patriotic sentiments to support U.S. intervention in Cuba. Grant Hamilton, *Judge*, July 9, 1898 — American Social History Project.

called the "yellow press" after cartoonist Richard Outcault's color comic strip "The Yellow Kid" — offered exaggerated foreign coverage with an unprecedented immediacy, thanks to new telegraph cables and fast printing presses.

On February 15, 1898, an unexplained explosion aboard the U.S. Navy's battleship *Maine*, which the U.S. government had sent into Havana Harbor to protect American citizens and property, killed 266 sailors. Congress blamed Spain and declared war in April, vowing in the Teller Amendment that the United States would guarantee Cuban independence. The public responded enthusiastically. "The newspapers, the theatrical posters, the street conversations for weeks had to do with war and bloodshed," settlement worker Jane Addams wrote of her Chicago neighborhood.

The United States also fought Spain in the Philippine Islands, where guerrillas led by Emilio Aguinaldo had been battling Spanish rule for two years. In 1897, Aguinaldo had gone into exile in Hong Kong. Two days after the U.S. Congress declared war, Commodore George Dewey sailed for Manila, with Aguinaldo on board. On May 1, 1898, the U.S. Navy arrived in Manila Bay, securing the harbor while the Filipino nationalist troops surrounded the capital city. Aguinaldo declared independence on June 12 (Map 3.4).

The U.S. military engagement in Cuba was brief: the U.S. Army and Marines landed in June, and Spanish power was



MAP 3.4 The Splendid Little War: The Spanish-Cuban-American War, 1898

In both theaters of the 1898 war against Spain, the United States triumphed quickly, in part because of its naval superiority. In the Philippines, Admiral George Dewey prevailed in a matter of days after the American declaration of war on April 25 and without the loss of a single American life. The Cuban conflict lasted a bit longer, but even there, the fighting was over by August. Before the United States entered the fighting, Cuban rebels had already brought Spain close to defeat.

broken in ten weeks. A young assistant secretary of the navy, Theodore Roosevelt, gained fame by quitting his job and leading a group of cavalry volunteers known as the Rough Riders. (The story of their horseback charge up San Juan Hill has often been retold, but the truth was more mundane than the myth. The Rough Riders were not actually on horseback—the horses had been accidentally left behind—and the hill they charged was nearby Kettle Hill. San Juan Hill sounded more exotic and romantic.) Many black soldiers, who had served in the West, joined the fight in Cuba. More than 10,000 black men, many of them from the North, answered the call for volunteers.

African American leaders, like white ones, divided over the Spanish-Cuban-American war. While Booker T. Washington saw volunteering for the war as an opportunity for black men "to show their loyalty to our land," other black leaders argued that men who were denied the franchise were not obliged to serve in the army. "In the South today," wrote Richmond editor John Mitchell, "exists a system of oppression as barbarous as that which is alleged to exist in Cuba."

An Overseas Empire In December 1898, the Treaty of Paris ended the war. Spain relinquished its claim to Cuba, sold the Philippines to the United States for $20 million, and transferred the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico and the Pacific island of Guam to the United States without compensation. The United States wanted Puerto Rico as a naval station in the Caribbean and as a market for manufactured goods. U.S. troops had occupied the island in July, meeting little opposition. Not everyone welcomed the terms; Puerto Ricans had little voice in the transfer, and Filipinos were ready to fight for their country's independence.

Although Americans and Filipinos had united to drive the Spanish forces from the islands, their relationship deteriorated after Spain's surrender. Aguinaldo and his broad base of supporters declared independence and established a republic in June 1898, but the United States refused to recognize it. President William McKinley declared that he intended instead to use "every legitimate means for the enlargement of American trade" and that American occupation would "educate, uplift, and Christianize" the Filipinos—ignorant of the fact that many of them already practiced Catholicism. Filipinos were determined to resist; two days before the U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris in February 1899, Aguinaldo and his forces mounted armed opposition to American occupation.

Nearly 200,000 U.S. troops fought in the Philippine War to suppress the independence movement, killing 16,000 to 20,000 Filipino soldiers between 1899 and 1902. Hundreds of thousands of civilians died from war-related famine and disease. Racism heightened the war's brutality. U.S. newspapers portrayed Filipinos as dark-skinned savages; one report declared that "picking off niggers [Filipinos] in the water" was "more fun than a turkey shoot."

"A Perfect Hailstorm of Bullets": A Black Sergeant Remembers the Battle of San Juan Hill in 1899

The well-known but erroneous image of Teddy Roosevelt charging with his Rough Riders up San Juan Hill in Cuba displaced attention from the role of African American soldiers in Cuba such as Sergeant-Major Frank W. Pullen, Jr. Black soldiers made up almost 25 percent of the U.S. force in Cuba. In this excerpt, Pullen describes how black soldiers almost seemed to have two enemies during the battle of El Caney and the capture of Santiago: the Spaniards and white American soldiers.

No one knows who started the charge; one thing is certain, at the time it was made excitement was running high; each man was a captain for himself and fighting accordingly. Brigadier Generals, Colonels, Lieutenant-Colonels, Majors, etc., were not needed at the time the 25th Infantry made the charge on El Caney, and those officers simply watched the battle from convenient points, as Lieutenants and enlisted men made the charge alone. It has been reported that the 12th U.S. Infantry made the charge, assisted by the 25th Infantry, but it is a recorded fact that the 25th Infantry fought the battle alone, the 12th Infantry coming up after the firing had nearly ceased. Private T. C. Butler, Company H, 25th Infantry, was the first man to enter the blockhouse at El Caney, and took possession of the Spanish flag for his regiment. An officer of the 12th Infantry came up while Butler was in the house and ordered him to give up the flag, which he was compelled to do, but not until he had torn a piece off the flag to substantiate his report to his Colonel of the injustice which had been done to him. Thus, by using the authority given him by his shoulder-straps, this officer took for his regiment that which had been won by the hearts' blood of some of the bravest, though black, soldiers of Shafter's army.

A word more in regard to the charge. It was not the glorious run from the edge of some nearby thicket to the top of a small hill, as many may imagine. This particular charge was a tough, hard climb, over sharp, rising ground, which, were a man in perfect physical strength, he would climb slowly. Part of the charge was made over soft, plowed ground, a part through a lot of prickly pineapple plants and barbed-wire entanglements. It was slow, hard work, under a blazing July sun and a perfect hailstorm of bullets, which, thanks to the poor marksmanship of the Spaniards, "went high."

Frank W. Pullen, Jr.
Ex-Sergeant-Major 25th U.S. Infantry. Enfield, N.C., March 23, 1899

Edward A. Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War* (Raleigh, 1899), 29–32. Reprinted in William Loren Katz, *Eyewitness: The Negro in American History* (New York: Pittman Publishing, 1967), 383–384.

Civilization Begins at Home
A cartoon in the *New York World* derided President McKinley's claim to "uplift and christianize" the Philippines, graphically portraying the racial terrorism occurring in America's own backyard. C. G. Bush, *New York World* — American Social History Project.

Though U.S. troops captured Aguinaldo in 1901 and officially declared peace in 1902, armed conflict continued for another decade.

During the Spanish-Cuban-American war, the United States had also annexed the Hawaiian islands. An American-controlled sugar industry had been developing there for half a century. The sugar interests had established a government favorable to them in 1887, but it was ousted four years later by the new queen, Liliuokalani. In 1893, with the support of the U.S. Marines, a group of planters led by Sanford B. Dole overthrew the queen, and the American ambassador, John L. Stevens, acting on his own authority, proclaimed Hawaii an American protectorate. Dole asked Congress to annex the islands, but an investigation revealed that most Hawaiians opposed it. When the United States sent a special commissioner to restore the queen to her throne under a liberal constitution, Dole refused to step aside. In 1894, he proclaimed Hawaii a republic. After several years of political wrangling, the outbreak of war with Spain convinced politicians of the need for a coaling station in the Pacific by the expanding and steam-powered U.S. Navy. Congress approved Hawaii's annexation in July 1898, and it became a territory, with Dole as governor, in 1900.

Not all Americans endorsed the nation's overseas expansion. In November 1898, a group of prominent citizens founded the Anti-Imperialist League. The writer Mark Twain, former president Grover Cleveland, steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie, activist Jane Addams, and the AFL's Samuel Gompers became national officers or supporters. Addams hated imperialism because of her pacifism and internationalism. Carnegie argued as a capitalist: "Possession of colonies or dependencies is not necessary for trade reasons," he reasoned, pointing out that the United States was leading the world in exports without foreign possessions. Gompers employed the racist language he had long used against Chinese immigration. "If the Philippines are annexed," he asked, "how can we prevent the Chinese coolies from going to the Philippines and from there swarm into the United States and engulf our people and our civilization?"

However prominent, the anti-imperialists did not represent majority opinion. Most businessmen, farmers, and urban working people believed that the United States had the right and duty to extend its influence.

American Soldiers in the Philippines Write Home about the War

The anti-imperialist movement, which rejected annexation by the United States of former Spanish colonies such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines, attempted to build opposition at home to the increasingly brutal war. Although few soldiers joined the anti-imperialist cause, their statements did sometimes provide ammunition for the opponents of annexation and war.

Arthur Minkler, of the Kansas Regiment says:

We advanced four miles and we fought every inch of the way; . . . saw twenty-five dead insurgents in one place and twenty-seven in another, besides a whole lot of them scattered along that I did not count. . . . It was like hunting rabbits; an insurgent would jump out of a hole or the brush and run; he would not get very far. . . . I suppose you are not interested in the way we do the job. We do not take prisoners. At least the Twentieth Kansas do not.

Ellis G. Davis, Company A, 20th Kansas:

They will never surrender until their whole race is exterminated. They are fighting for a good cause, and the Americans should be the last of all nations to transgress upon such rights. Their independence is dearer to them than life, as ours was in years gone by, and is today. They should have their independence, and would have had it if those who make the laws in America had not been so slow in deciding the Philippine question. Of course, we have to fight now to protect the honor of our country but there is not a man who enlisted to fight these people, and should the United States annex these islands, none but the most bloodthirsty will claim himself a hero. This is not a lack of patriotism, but my honest belief.

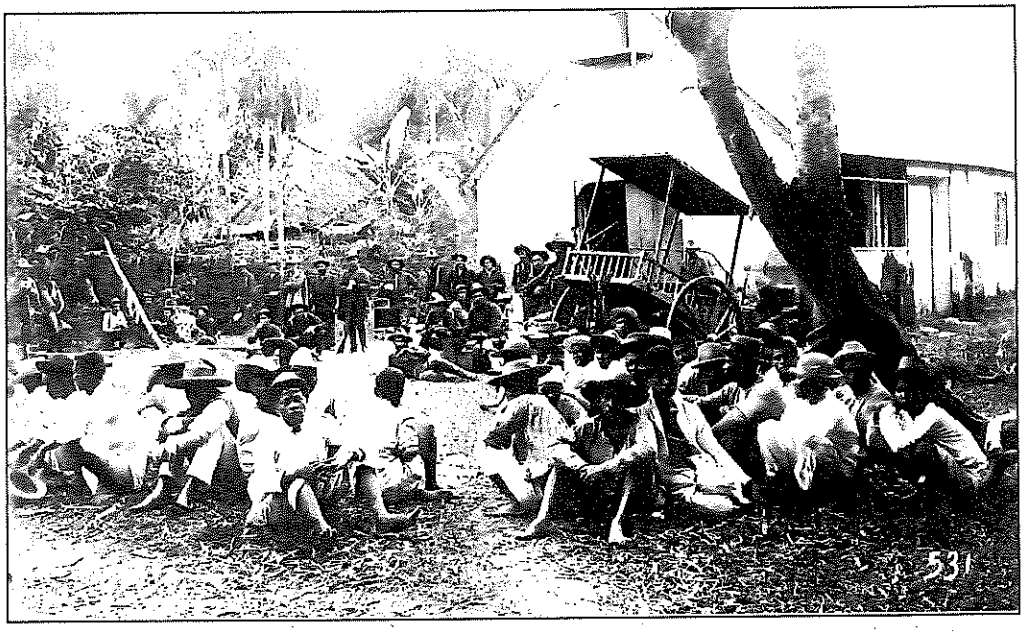
Soldier's Letters, pamphlet (Anti-Imperialist League, 1899). Reprinted in Philip S. Foner and Richard Winchester, *The Anti-Imperialist Reader: A Documentary History of Anti-Imperialism in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 316–323.

Presidential adviser Mark Hanna explained that the Philippine annexation would allow the United States to "take a large slice of the commerce of Asia. . . . We are bound to share in the commerce of the Far East and it is better to strike for it while the iron is hot." Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana equated the drive for empire with the near-religious theme of "Manifest Destiny": "Shall the American people continue their march toward commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign . . . until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind?" For people like Beveridge, the ostensible closing of the frontier meant that America's "manifest destiny" was now in Asia. Beveridge also echoed the themes of masculine revival that motivated so many advocates of war and manifest destiny. Expansion, he declared, "means

opportunity for all the glorious young manhood of the republic—the most virile, ambitious, impatient, militant manhood the world has ever seen."

Politicians and businessmen decided against a policy of European-style colonization; for the most part, the United States would not own territories or administer governments. Instead, American policymakers advocated aggressive economic expansion, which was carried out with a heavy hand in Latin America. Theodore Roosevelt, who became president in 1901 following McKinley's assassination, argued that the U.S. government should exercise "international police power" in the Western Hemisphere, a policy that became known as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. (In 1823, President James Monroe had declared that Latin America should not be subject to European colonization.) Thus, the United States refused to withdraw its troops from Cuba after the war, reserving the right to intervene whenever order seemed to be threatened. The Platt Amendment of 1901, which granted the United States the right to intervene and build naval bases in Cuba, codified this policy. To end U.S. occupation, Cuban legislators meeting to draft a constitution ratified the amendment. Although troops withdrew in 1902, they returned from 1906 to 1909 and again in 1912 and 1917 to prop up governments that were sympathetic to U.S. business interests.

With bases in Cuba and Puerto Rico, American businessmen now focused on building a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, a province of Colombia. In 1902, Colombia rejected a proposed treaty granting the United States the right to build the canal. The next year, a group of Colombian businessmen and politicians, operating with U.S. naval support, declared northern Colombia an independent country and named it Panama. Canal rights and construction quickly followed, and the U.S.-built Panama Canal opened in 1914.



"Benevolent Assimilation"
U.S. troops guard Filipino nationalist prisoners captured in Pasay and Paranque during the Filipino-American War. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

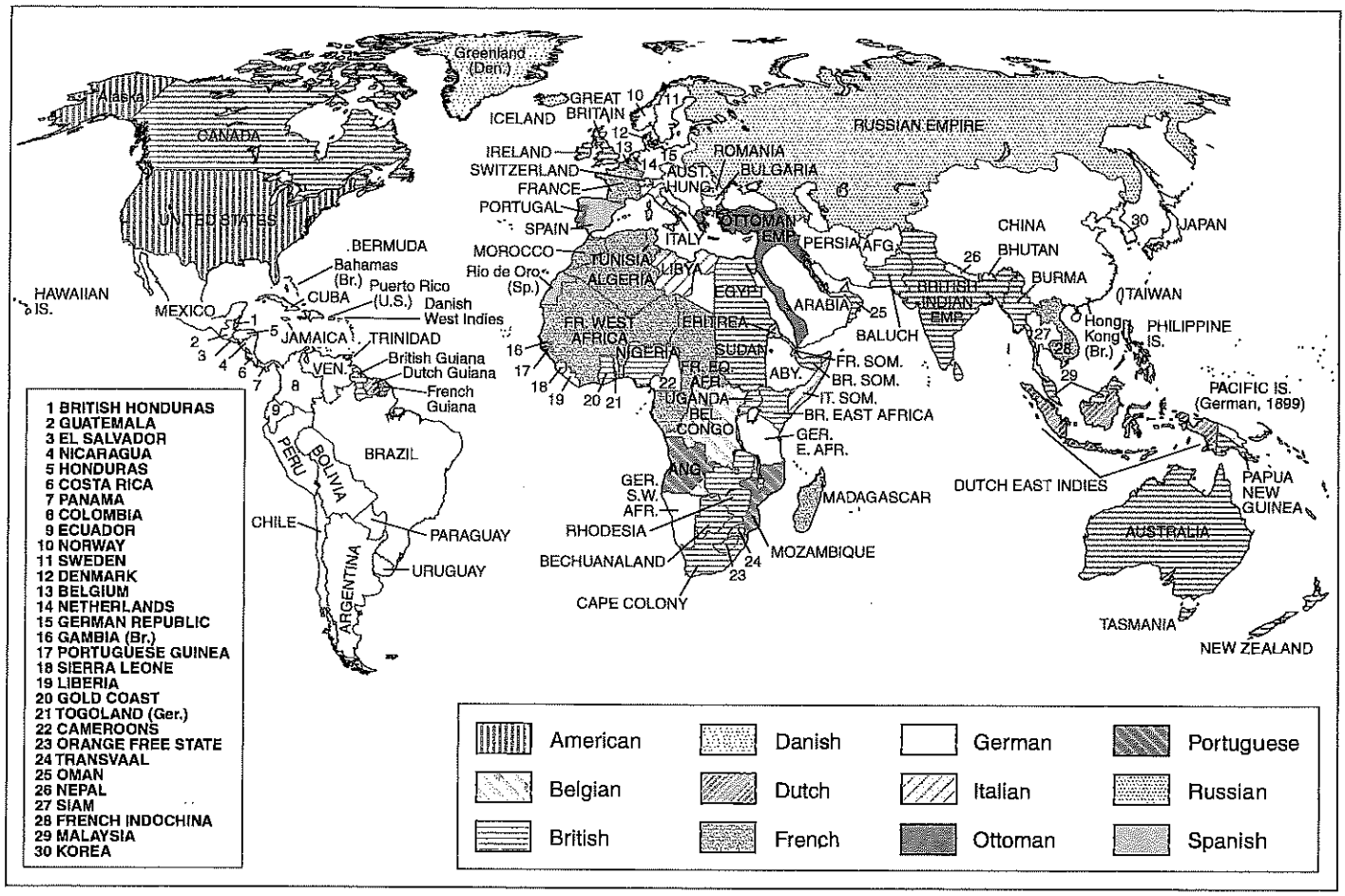
In the 1910s and 1920s, the United States placed troops throughout the Caribbean and Central America. It intervened in revolts in Nicaragua in 1910 and 1912, occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and used military power to support economic interests and protect sea routes in Colombia, Honduras, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. This government muscle protected an increased U.S. corporate presence in South and Central America. Exports to Latin America had more than doubled between 1900 and 1914. U.S. corporations treated Latin America as their private preserve and sought to limit competition from European capitalists.

The United States could not pursue such a bold policy in Asia. European powers already had extensive economic interests there, backed by formal colonies or strong ties with local governments (Map 3.5). The United States therefore advocated an "Open Door" policy, hoping to gain new markets and access to raw materials in areas where other nations already dominated. In 1899, Secretary of State John Hay sent notes presenting the new policy to the major occupying powers in China by arguing that all industrialized nations should have equal access to Chinese trade. The European nations and Japan responded evasively, but Hay brashly insisted that they had given "final and definitive" assent.

Almost at the same time, the Chinese launched a rebellion against foreign exploitation. The Boxers, a secret nationalist organization, attacked foreigners and foreign influences throughout China. Five thousand U.S. troops joined an expeditionary force to relieve the siege of the British embassy in Beijing, where the foreign diplomatic corps had taken refuge. The U.S. troops help to break the siege in August 1900 and end the Boxer Rebellion. Hay then successfully used the rebellion to persuade the foreign powers to respond more favorably to a second round of Open Door notes. Hay's Open Door policy did not end foreign (especially Japanese) control of Chinese soil, but it did become the centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy in the new century. American policymakers embraced the dual beliefs that U.S. economic well-being required global expansion and that this expansion would be accomplished by open markets rather than direct imperial conquest.

As business and political leaders had predicted, global expansion and military expenditures increased the nation's wealth and helped to pull it out of depression. For the first time, the United States had an overseas empire, backed by a standing army that had nearly quadrupled in size between 1898 and 1901. U.S. political and military involvement in the internal affairs of other countries would profoundly shape twentieth-century experience.

By 1914, American businessmen had more than $3.5 billion invested abroad, making the United States one of the world's four largest investor nations. Dozens of American companies — Coca Cola, DuPont, Standard Oil, Ford, General Electric, and Gillette among them — operated two or



MAP 3.5 The Age of Imperialism: The World in 1900
In 1898, the United States belatedly entered the imperialist race to carve up the globe by acquiring far-flung possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific. But as this map shows, it lagged behind the established imperial powers such as Britain and France.

more facilities abroad. The United Fruit Company grew bananas for the U.S. market on more than a million acres it owned in Central America; it also owned or controlled Central American railroads, docks, and communications networks. Direct foreign investment in 1914 was 7 percent of gross national product—the same proportion it would be in 1966. U.S. capitalism had truly become international.

Business on the Rebound Supported by global expansion, the U.S. industrial economy began to boom again, growing to astonishing size and strength in the first decade of the new century. The long depression had begun to lift in 1896. The discovery of gold on the Klondike River in the Yukon Territory the next year (and new goldfields in South Africa) suddenly ended both the contentious issue of the gold standard and the deflationary trend that had dominated the economy for the past three decades. The flow of money into the world economy relieved debt-burdened farmers and brought renewed prosperity to industrial workers. With recovery came new talk of cooperation between labor and industry (Figure 3.2).

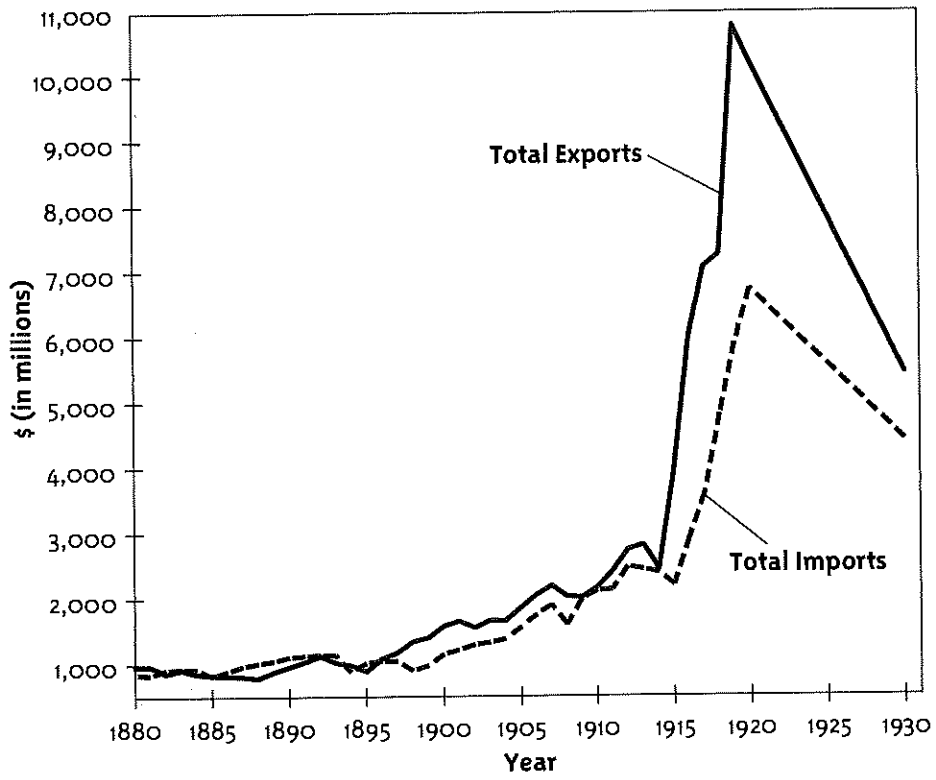


FIGURE 3.2 Going Global: U.S. Imports and Exports, 1880–1930

It was only after 1880 that American involvement in the emerging international economy took off. However, the most rapid growth did not come until the twentieth century.

Big business was the order of the day, and it was carried on in enormous factories. In 1870, only a handful of plants had employed more than 500 workers. By 1900, nearly 1,500 factories had reached that size, and some became truly gigantic. The Cambria Steel factory in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, employed nearly 20,000 people by early in the twentieth century. General Electric employed 15,000 at its factory in Schenectady, New York, and 11,000 at another plant in Lynn, Massachusetts.

As the economy gained strength, businessmen resumed their efforts to reduce competition. Some founded trade associations, organizations that brought competitors together to establish standards or lobby politicians in an industry's interests. Others combined forces more directly; beginning in 1898, American businessmen engaged in a frenzy of merger activity. By the early twentieth century, three hundred giant firms controlled nearly two-fifths of American manufacturing capital. As corporations grew, effective control was concentrated in fewer hands (Figure 3.3).

The financier J. P. Morgan organized the biggest new combination in 1901: U.S. Steel, created from 150 corporations, including Carnegie's, and capitalized at over $1 billion. Competition in the steel industry virtually disappeared. U.S. Steel was large enough to dictate prices, and like Carnegie's earlier company, the giant corporation was vertically integrated, making it invulnerable both to suppliers' price increases and to labor problems.

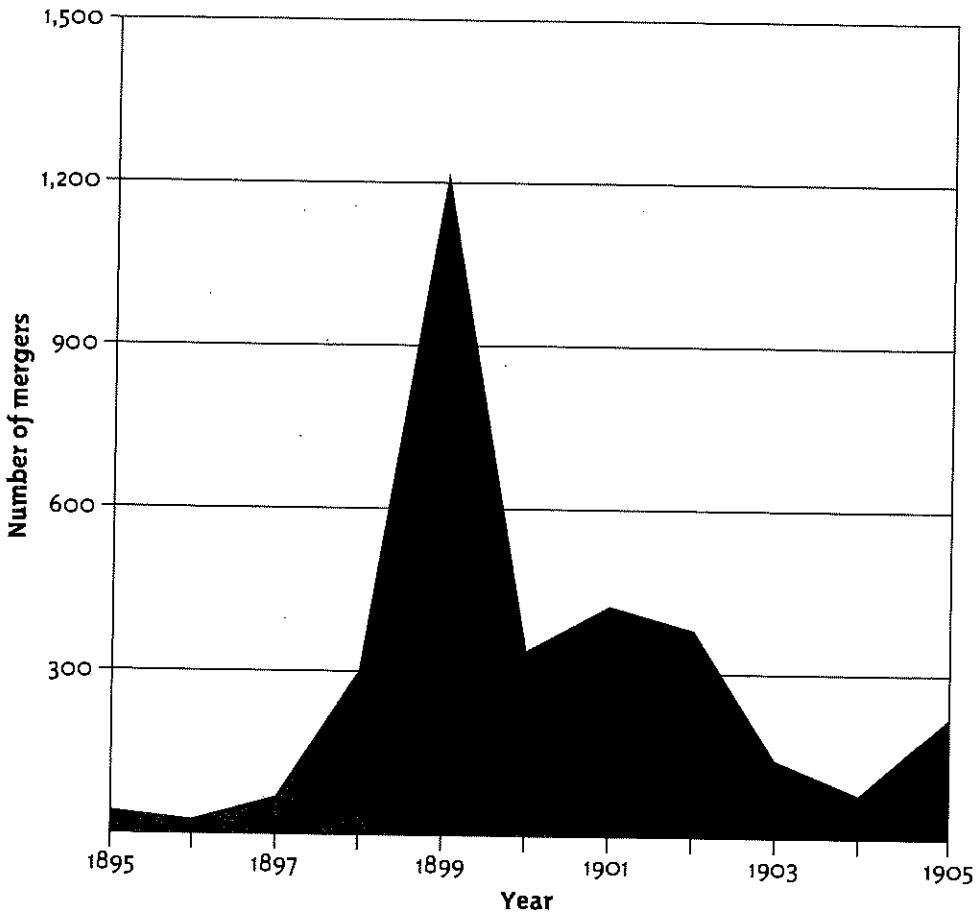
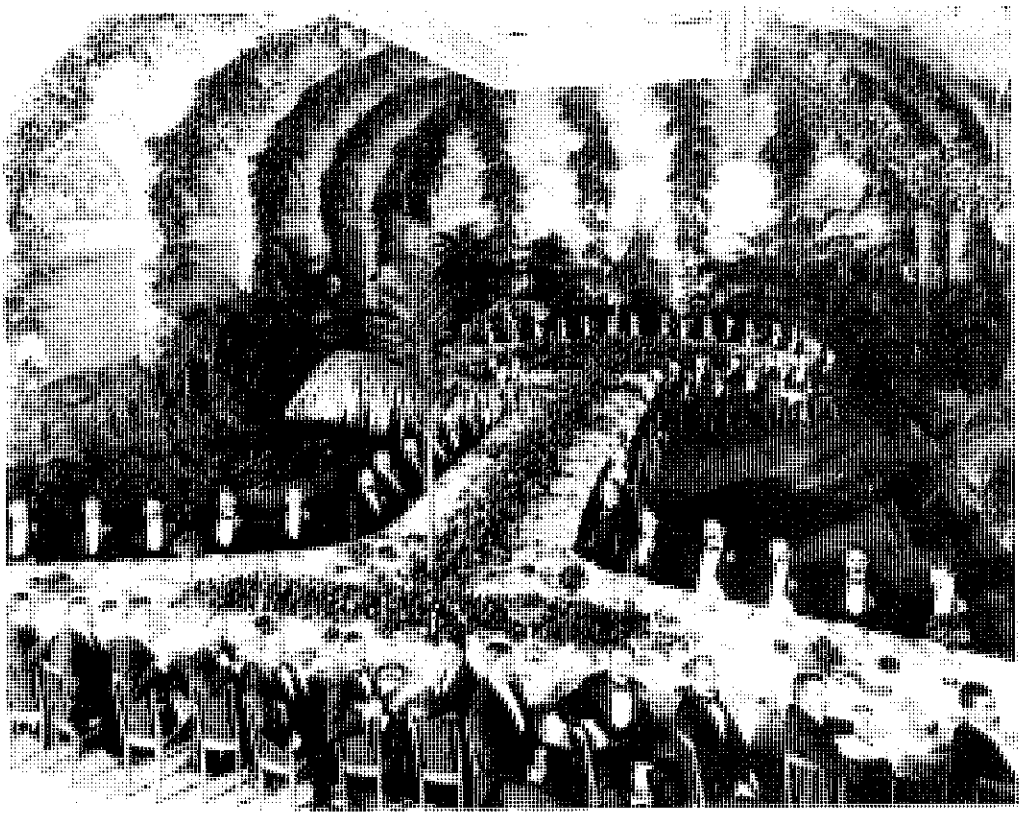


FIGURE 3.3 Merger Mania, 1895–1905
As the economy rebounded after the 1893–1897 depression, corporations began merging to form larger and often monopolistic companies, a trend that continued into the new century.

Some attempts at combination failed. Although General Electric and Goodyear became household names, U.S. Leather and United Button did not survive. In industries that did not require large investments in expensive machinery, new competitors could still challenge trusts. By 1910, manufacturing had divided into two distinct sectors. Very large corporations dominated industries that required heavy capital investments, while small firms competed feverishly in industries that did not. Thus, the leather, printing, clothing, and construction industries remained highly competitive, with thousands of firms battling for a slice of the market. Many small manufacturing firms that made clothing, jewelry, and furniture still did batch work, producing many styles, colors, and sizes rather than mass-producing identical items. And small business still dominated retailing. Although Sears and Montgomery Ward had both grown huge through their catalogue sales, and chain stores had emerged in the groceries, drugs, and general merchandise, most retail stores were small and run by individual proprietors.

But big business dominated business-government relationships and business ideology. Only big businesses had the resources to lobby Congress or to create combinations large and powerful enough to ensure dependable



Eat, Drink, and Be Merry
The managers of the nation's competing steel companies gathered together in 1901 to celebrate their merger into the giant U.S. Steel Corporation.
The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

supplies, markets, transportation, and banking connections. The problem of how to deal with these huge concentrations of wealth and power and the way their lack of accountability to the people threatened the fabric of democracy became one of the driving issues of the day. Though agitation against big combinations such as Standard Oil had begun in the 1880s, the vaguely worded Sherman Antitrust Act, passed in 1890, did not define either *trust* or *monopoly*. As a result, the courts threw out cases against the sugar and whiskey trusts. Ironically, although the biggest businesses did not suffer from the Sherman Antitrust Act, the labor movement did.

Organized Labor in a Time of Recovery As the economy expanded following the depression, AFL-affiliated craft unions enjoyed a brief resurgence. Industrial growth created a labor shortage, especially among skilled workers. Knowing that they were in demand, workers became less fearful of the consequences of collective action, and they renewed their struggle to build unions. Between 1897 and 1904, the number of unionized working people more than quadrupled, to over two million.

The resurgence of craft unionism was concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest in basic industries such as railroads, metalworking, construction, and coal mining. Skilled workers—primarily men of Northern and

An Alphabet of Joyous Trusts

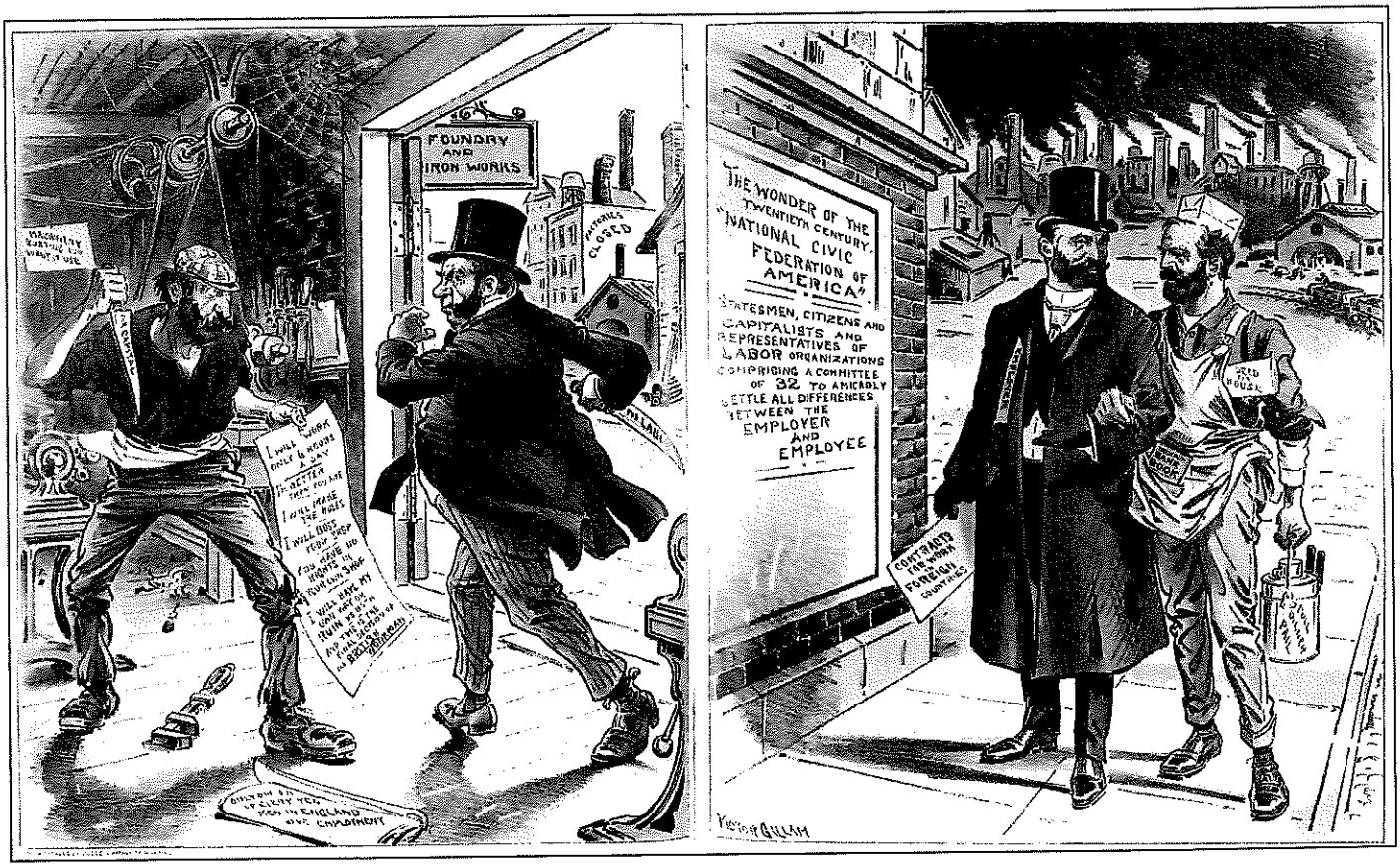
A segment of cartoonist Frederick Opper's "Nursery Rhymes for Infant Industries," published in the *New York American* in 1902. Opper closed his primer with these words:

With these alphabet pictures
the artist took pains,
But he's got to stop now, and
with grief nearly busts —
'Cause our language but
twenty-six letters contains,
Though our country contains
twenty-six hundred Trusts.

Frederick Opper, *New York American*, September 1902 — Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Western European stock—fought, often with great militancy, to retain and extend shop-floor rights won in earlier scuffles with management. Established craft unions, most of them members of the American Federation of Labor, led these battles.

AFL unions generally excluded less-skilled workers, immigrants, African Americans, and women. Even on occasions when the rank and file showed solidarity with workers of other races and nationalities, AFL leaders typically resisted the integration of nonwhite workers. In Oxnard, California, 1,200 Mexican and Japanese farm laborers won a hard-fought strike against sugar beet growers in 1903. But the AFL refused to charter the group unless they excluded the Japanese workers. Indignant, the beet workers refused to accept a charter under those conditions. "In the past we have counseled, fought and lived on very short rations with our Japanese brothers, and toiled with them in the fields," their Mexican leader wrote to Gompers. "We would be false to them and to ourselves and to the cause of unionism if we now accepted privileges for ourselves which are not accorded to them."



Samuel Gompers thought of unions in more pedestrian terms, as "business organizations of wage-earners." AFL unions were stable, centralized organizations, directed by well-paid professional leaders who held their posts for years. In the building trades, full-time union officials known as "business agents" negotiated with contractors and assigned jobs to union members. These officials, although they helped craft unions to grow more stable and effective, also tended to frame union goals concretely, solely in terms of wages and working conditions.

The upsurge of craft unionism prompted some industrialists to seek peaceful solutions to industrial conflict. In that spirit, corporate leaders, bankrolled by financiers August Belmont and J. P. Morgan, founded the National Civic Federation (NCF) in 1900. Seeking employer acceptance of "responsible" unions, NCF leaders denounced both radicals and antiunion employers. They encouraged mediation as a method for settling disputes and fostered "welfare capitalism"—the pension plans, insurance, and recreational activities that some employers hoped would frustrate union organizers. The NCF urged employers to negotiate industrywide labor agreements through trade associations; such agreements were signed in the metalworking, newspaper, mining, ironmolding, and pottery industries. For a brief moment, the war between owners and skilled workers appeared to be over.

The Labor Question and Its Solution

A two-panel cartoon in a 1902 issue of the satirical weekly *Judge* endorsed the National Civic Federation. The first panel shows British labor relations, "capital and labor fighting to the death, at the same time destroying English commercial life," while the second panel depicts American "labor and capital on friendly terms, aiding each other, and together making the United States the greatest commercial nation in the world." Victor Gilliam, *Judge*, January 25, 1902 — American Social History Project.

That moment soon passed. In one industry after another, rank-and-file skilled workers refused to accept the weakening of their workplace control. Displays of worker militancy, such as a nationwide machinists' strike called in 1900 at the insistence of insurgent locals, convinced most corporate leaders that peace with labor cost too much. They rejected union demands and crushed ensuing strikes. By 1903, many employers had broken with the NCF and reverted to their old union-busting tactics: blacklists to prevent union activists from getting jobs, spies to gather information on organizing efforts, and strikebreakers to keep factories running when strikes did occur.

The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) led employers in these efforts. Founded in 1895, the NAM united primarily small and medium-size manufacturers. In 1903 it took command of the employers' battle for "the open shop"—a contractual guarantee of the right to work without union membership—and of the employers' right to bar unions from factories. The rhetorical strategy of describing antiunionism as "open" put labor on the defensive.

Together with fluctuations in the economy, the open-shop drive slowed and then halted the spread of craft unionism. After nearly seven years of growth, membership in the AFL dropped by nearly 200,000 in 1905. New technology and the reorganization of factories made it easier for capitalists to replace skilled workers with the less skilled; organizations such as the NAM enhanced businessmen's ability to shape public opinion.

Permanent organizations were more difficult to sustain among workers, where social divisions between the skilled and the less-skilled, immigrant and native-born, black and white, male and female undercut the union movement. More important, the AFL itself helped to undermine the movement through its reluctance to bridge those gaps.

Conclusion: End of a Century, End of an Era

Class conflict defined the final two decades of the nineteenth century as working people confronted, with extraordinary creativity, the profound changes wrought by industrial capitalism. The first truly national working-class movement emerged in these years out of the militant protests and oppositional ideas of workers and farmers across the country. In creating a culture of resistance, the late-nineteenth-century labor movement rejected not only capitalists' growing control over the nation's economic and political life, but also the twin ideologies of acquisitive individualism and Social Darwinism that served to justify that control. While the movement's programs were eclectic, its philosophies diverse, and its outright victories few, it nonetheless succeeded in galvanizing millions of people with an alternative vision of industrial America rooted in mutuality, cooperation, equal justice, and democracy.

But the bitter defeats suffered by the Knights of Labor in 1886, the Homestead workers in 1892, the industrial armies in 1893 and 1894, the Pullman workers in 1894, and the Populists in 1896 eroded the power of this alternative vision and marked the end of an era. As a result, many working people in cities and the countryside retreated into insular cultures that included strong elements of racism and nativism. The nineteenth century closed with the labor and agrarian movements fragmented and their broad, organizing efforts defeated. The return of economic prosperity, the expansion of American corporations abroad, and the wave of mergers that swept through the economy further consolidated the power of giant corporations.

The bitter defeats of the 1880s and 1890s left permanent scars. The United States would never again witness such a broad or fundamental challenge by working people to the claims of capital. Thus, as the new century dawned, neither popular movements nor the government imposed serious constraints on the actions of the nation's capitalists. Working people, African Americans, immigrants, and women would need to find new ways to mitigate their subordinate position in American society.

The Years in Review

1887

- The American Protective Association is formed to drive Catholics out of American politics.

1890

- Mississippi enacts legislation to prevent African Americans from voting, setting a precedent that all southern states will follow over the next two decades.
- Congress passes the Sherman Antitrust Act, the first federal antitrust law, in an effort to regulate big business.
- The Farmers' Alliance moves into politics and captures four governorships and more than forty congressional seats.

1892

- Congress renews the Chinese Exclusion Act.
- The Ellis Island immigration depot opens. Between 1880 and 1900, nine million immigrants arrive in the United States, many from Eastern and Southern Europe. Another fourteen million will arrive between 1900 and 1920.
- The People's (Populist) Party holds its first convention and adopts the Omaha Platform, attacking economic and social conditions and calling for action; Populists win more than one million votes and elect governors in Kansas and Colorado in the fall election.

- Ida B. Wells-Barnett launches an antilynching campaign to stem the growing violence against African Americans in the South.
- Grover Cleveland is elected president for a second term.

1893

- The Chicago's World Fair celebrates the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas.
- A five-year economic collapse begins as the stock market crashes on May 3.
- The Immigration Restriction League is formed to limit the "new" non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants.
- U.S. sugar planters led by Sanford B. Dole overthrow Hawaii's Queen Liliuokalani with the support of the U.S. Marines. Hawaii is proclaimed an American protectorate.

1894

- Jacob S. Coxey's army of unemployed workers marches on Washington, D.C.
- The Pullman strike ends in defeat for workers.

1895

- Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech accepts racial separatism.

1896

- Republican William McKinley is elected president over Democratic and Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan.
- The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* sanctions racial segregation.
- Gold is discovered along the Klondike River in Yukon Territory, which leads to the Alaska Gold Rush.

1898

- The United States enters the Spanish-Cuban-American War after the U.S.S. *Maine* explodes in Havana Harbor on February 15, killing 266 sailors.
- The Treaty of Paris ends the war with Spain; Spain relinquishes its claim to Cuba, sells the Philippines to the United States for $20 million, and transfers Puerto Rico and Guam to U.S. control.
- The United States annexes Hawaii.
- Emilio Aguinaldo declares Philippine independence, but the United States refuses to recognize the republic and fights a guerrilla war against the Filipino nationalists.

- The Anti-Imperialist League forms to oppose U.S. annexation of overseas colonies.

1899

- Secretary of State John Hay issues the "Open Door" notes to European powers, arguing that all industrialized nations should be given equal access to Chinese trade.

1900

- Corporate leaders found the National Civic Federation to seek peaceful solutions to industrial conflict and to condemn antiunion employers. By 1903, many employers had broken with the NCF and reverted to union busting.
- The Boxer Rebellion attacks foreigners and foreign influences in China.
- William McKinley is reelected president.

1901

- The Platt Amendment grants the United States the right to intervene and build naval bases in Cuba.
- J. P. Morgan underwrites the creation of U.S. Steel, earning $7 million in the creation of the first billion-dollar corporation.
- Vice President Theodore Roosevelt becomes president after the assassination of William McKinley.

1902

- The Colombian government rejects a U.S. proposal to build a canal across Panama.
- President Theodore Roosevelt declares the end of the war in the Philippines, but fighting continues for another decade.

1903

- Twelve hundred Mexican and Japanese farm laborers win a hard-fought strike against sugar beet growers.
- New leaders declare Panama an independent nation and grant the United States rights to build the Panama Canal.
- W. E. B. DuBois publishes *The Souls of Black Folk* to counter Booker T. Washington's position on segregation.

1904

- The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine asserts a U.S. right to intervene in Latin America.

1905

- The Niagara Movement demands an end to segregation and racial discrimination in every area of U.S. life; it leads to founding of

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People four years later.

1907

- President Theodore Roosevelt concludes a "gentleman's agreement" with Japan to exclude Japanese workers from the United States.

1909

- U.S. troops are dispatched to Nicaragua.

1914

- The Panama Canal opens.
- U.S. direct foreign investments total $3.5 billion, 7 percent of the U.S. gross national product.

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