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New Frontiers: Westward Expansion and Industrial Growth

1865–1877

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In 1876, the United States reached a venerable anniversary. The republic had survived for a century since declaring its independence from England. Although only a decade had passed since the end of the bloody Civil War, many of America's political and business leaders believed that their country deserved a spectacular birthday party that would display the nation's achievements in industry, science, agriculture, and the arts. Designed to meet these heady expectations, the Centennial Exposition opened on four hundred and fifty acres in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park on May 10, 1876. Ten million people, from every state and more than thirty countries, flocked to the celebration over the next six months.

The major exhibition buildings were gigantic. In this still largely rural nation, Agricultural Hall covered more than ten acres. Inside, visitors marveled at the latest mowing and reaping machines. But the centerpiece of the Exposition was the 700-ton, 40-foot-high Corliss Double Walking-Beam Engine, which generated 1,400 horsepower, enough to drive all the other machines in the enormous hall. Powered by a steam boiler in an adjacent building and running almost silently, the engine was an awesome creation, representing in the beauty of its motion, design, and power the very essence of the new industrial age.

Some Americans, however, were put off by the grandeur and pomp of the Centennial Exposition. They viewed it less as a celebration of the nation's achievements than as a diversion from hard and bitter daily realities. Neglected and sometimes stifled by the lavish festivities, these "other Americans" — including women, African Americans, American Indians, and workers — raised issues that would resonate far into the future.

"Railroad Riot Extra"
The burning Pennsylvania Railroad roundhouse illuminates the Pittsburgh nighttime sky on Saturday, July 21, 1877, as recorded by a local artist and disseminated by a leading illustrated newsweekly during the nationwide railroad strike. John Donaghy, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 4, 1877 — American Social History Project.

The Centennial's Women's Pavilion, for example, was fraught with division. Paid for with contributions from across the country, the pavilion presented visitors with crafts, inventions, and institutions established and conducted by women. Yet to many observers, the displays focused too much on the private, "domestic" sphere and too little on women's public achievements. As if to highlight this point, the National Woman's Suffrage Association held its founding meeting in New York City on the same day that the Women's Pavilion opened in Philadelphia. And at the Centennial's July Fourth ceremonies, feminists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony disrupted the proceedings to read a Woman's Declaration of Independence that demanded equal rights for women in the family, the church, politics, work, and wages.

If women's role was limited at the Exposition, the contributions of African Americans were nearly invisible. African American women, who had helped to raise funds for the Centennial, found no place in the Women's Pavilion. No black men were hired on the crews that constructed the Centennial buildings, and visitors saw African Americans doing only menial tasks or performing in the Southern Restaurant, where (as a guidebook described it) "a band of old-time plantation 'darkies' . . . sing their quaint melodies and strum the banjo." This pervasive racism manifested itself again during the Centennial's opening ceremonies. Frederick Douglass—the militant abolitionist and acknowledged leader of the nation's African Americans—was invited to sit on the opening-day speakers' platform but not to speak.

Even America's Indian population played a more pronounced role than African Americans did, though not entirely by design. The Smithsonian Institution mounted a massive Centennial exhibit of Indian artifacts, replete with pottery, tepees, totem poles, and life-sized costumed mannequins. But if the exhibit suggested that Indians had vanished from American life, visitors were rudely reminded of their continued efforts to maintain sovereignty in the western United States. In July 1876, news reached the Centennial of the victory of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors at the Battle of Little Big Horn in the Dakota territory, where General George Custer and more than 200 U.S. Army soldiers perished.

White working-class men and women were among those who were shocked by news of Custer's defeat. Few saw any similarity between their own struggles for justice at the workplace and Indians' efforts to regain control of their native economy, government, and culture. Yet both Indians and workers found themselves at war with new economic and political forces. The Indians at the Centennial Exposition were brought as museum exhibits. The workers, however, were alive and well, if disgruntled. Indeed, some workers attended the celebration via excursions arranged by their employers, who hoped to ease workers' growing discontent with the ravages of

industrial capitalism. Perhaps the defeat at Little Big Horn momentarily overshadowed class conflicts by reminding white Americans that they still had common enemies to confront on the western frontier.

Indeed, as travelers visited the exposition, there was plenty of evidence that the United States faced struggles on both the western and industrial frontiers. Custer's defeat highlighted the continued battles over western expansion. Northern workers, American Indians, western emigrants, and women found their opportunities restrained by some of the same forces that curtailed equality for blacks. Indeed, to many Americans, it seemed that the Civil War had been fought to destroy the power of one ruling class, southern slaveholders, only to produce another: an industrial oligarchy.

The trial of twenty coal miners in a Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, courtroom that summer reflected the conflicts that erupted when big business and organized labor confronted each other. These developments, moreover, were not unrelated. Railroads and mining corporations, which were among the most important forces behind the rise of big business, sparked an endless demand for more western lands. At the same time, federal troops that honed their skills fighting Indians to protect these western investments would later turn their firepower against workers on strike. And most of those disgruntled workers, like the 20 on trial in Pennsylvania and the thousands that launched the Great Uprising of 1877, focused their anger on the owners of mines and railroads.

Change and Violence on the Frontier

Although the United States had gained legal authority over lands stretching to the Pacific Ocean before the Civil War, the nation had still not fully settled, much less conquered, this vast territory. American Indians and Mexicans, resident in the West for centuries, did not willingly relinquish their property or their rights. At the same time, white Americans, immigrants, and African Americans continued to look to the West for economic opportunities and the chance for a fresh start. All of these groups increasingly competed with big business, especially railroads, for land and authority on this contested terrain.

Railroads and Settlers Move West By the late 1870s, thousands of African Americans across the South joined hundreds of thousands of new settlers—native-born and immigrant, black and white, women and men—and headed west, hoping for a new start on the "open lands" of the frontier. Some hoped for wealth from newly discovered mineral resources. Others sought land for farming. Still others searched for a refuge from the repression and conflicts of their former southern homes.

Heading West
A group of immigrants pose beside a Central Pacific train stopped at Mill City, Nevada, en route to California in 1880.
American Association of Railroads.

The railroad turned these dreams of western expansion into a reality not only for eastern and southern migrants but also for corporate investors. Between 1867 and 1873, railroad companies laid 35,000 miles of track in the United States—as much as was built in the three previous decades. In 1862, in the midst of the Civil War, Congress had chartered the Union Pacific and Central Pacific corporations to construct a line between Omaha, Nebraska, and Sacramento, California. In 1869, a golden spike—hammered into place with great ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah—marked the completion of the link between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

The largest government subsidies in U.S. history financed the railroad boom. Between 1862 and 1872, Congress gave the railroad companies more than 100 million acres of public land and over $64 million in loans and tax breaks. The Republican congressmen who had voted for these huge grants linked assistance to the railroads with what appeared to be a pathbreaking land bill: the Homestead Act of 1862. This act opened the West to settlement and allowed any adult citizen or permanent immigrant to claim 160 acres of public land for a $10 fee; final title to the land would be granted after five years of residence on the land. (In 1862, Congress also passed the Morrill Act, which gave land grants to states to build state universities using profits from the sale of public lands to the railroads.) A law such as the Homestead Act had long been demanded by urban workers, and its supporters heralded it as the salvation of the laboring man. "Should it become

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"Every Lick We Strike Is for Ourselves": A Homesteader Writes Home

In the fall of 1872, Union Army veteran Uriah Oblinger and two of his wife's brothers took advantage of the Homestead Act and migrated west; the following year, his wife Mattie and daughter Ella joined him in Nebraska. Borrowing techniques from the Plains Indians and earlier pioneers in Kansas, Mattie Oblinger and other homesteaders built sod houses. They cut the prairie sod deep and wide, laid it up like giant bricks, and fit the bricks together snugly without mortar. In this 1873 letter to her family back in Indiana, Mattie describes her community of neighbors and her sod house.

I have just as good neighbors as I ever had any where and they are very sociable. I was never in a neighborhood where all was as near on equality as they are here. Those that have been here have a little the most they all have cows and that is quite a help here. I get milk & butter from Mrs Furgison who lives 1/4 of a mile from us get the milk for nothing and pay twelve cents a pound for butter she makes good butter. Most all of the people here live in Sod houses and dug outs. I like the sod house the best they are the most convenient. I expect you think we live miserable because we are in a sod house but I tell you in solid earnest I never enjoyed my self better but George I expect you are ready to say It is because it is somthing new. No this not the case it is because we are . . . on our own and the thoughts of moveing next spring does not bother me and every lick we strike is for our selves and not half for some one else. I tell you this is quite a consolation to us who have been renters so long there are no renters here every one is on his own and doing the best he can and not much a head yet for about all that are here was renters and it took about all they had to get here. Some come here and put up temporary frame houses thought they could not live in a sod house. This fall they are going to build sod houses so they can live comfortable this winter a temporary frame house here is a poor thing a house that is not plastered the wind and dust goes right through and they are very cold. A sod house can be built so they are real nice and comfortable build nice walls and then plaster and lay a floor above and below and then they are nice.

Uriah W. Oblinger Collection, Nebraska Historical Society, from *Prairie Settlement: Nebraska Photographs and Family Letters*; American Memory, Library of Congress (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/nbhihtml/pshome.html).

a law," wrote the Radical Republican George Julian before it was passed, "the poor white laborers . . . would flock to the territories, where labor would be respectable, [and] our democratic theory of equality would be put in practice."

A vast expansion of farming in the West did follow closely on the heels of the railroads (Table 13.1). In the decade following the completion of the transcontinental line in 1869, Kansas attracted 347,000 new settlers. Similarly dramatic increases occurred in the other Plains states. Only about one-tenth of the new farms in these years were acquired under the Homestead Act, however. The land was free, but a city laborer, making perhaps $250 a year, could not even pay the entry fees to file a claim, let alone raise the

Railroad Mileage and the Expansion of Settlement, 1840–1860

State	1840 Railroads	1850 Railroads	1860 Railroads
New York	453	1,409	2,682
Pennsylvania	576	900	2,598
Massachusetts	270	1,042	1,264
New Jersey	192	332	560
Connecticut	94	436	601
Ohio	39	590	2,946
Indiana	20	226	2,163
Illinois	26	118	2,799
Missouri	---	4	817
Michigan	114	349	779
Iowa	---	---	655
Wisconsin	---	20	905
Virginia	341	341	1,731
North Carolina	247	249	937
Georgia	212	666	1,420
South Carolina	136	270	973
Maryland	273	315	386
Tennessee	---	48	1,253
Kentucky	32	80	534
Alabama	51	112	743
Mississippi	50	60	862
Louisiana	62	89	335
Texas	---	---	307

TABLE 13.1 Railroad Mileage and the Expansion of Settlement, 1840–1860

The spread of railroads throughout the Northeast and to the West and South sometimes followed the path of settlement and at other times helped to set that path. In the years between 1840 and the Civil War, rail lines were particularly important in establishing links between the Northeast and what we now think of as the Midwest. This chart illustrates the extension of railroad tracks to the West, particularly to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the railroad also reached several southern states in this period, the number of miles of track laid there was considerably smaller, especially given the size of the states involved. *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, 25* (September 1851), 381–382, for 1840 and 1850; and Henry V. Poor, *Manual of the Railroads of the United States* for 1868–69 (1868).

substantial funds that were necessary to buy farm equipment and move west. Indeed, many workingmen, including European and Asian immigrants, native-born whites, and African Americans, could make the journey to Kansas and similar destinations only by signing on as laborers with the heavily subsidized railroad companies.

Instead of western lands going mainly to individual small farmers, some people staked claims under the Homestead Act as a means of acquiring land for large mining and lumber companies. A provision of the act allowed homesteaders to obtain full and immediate title to land by paying $1.25 or $2.50 an acre for it. The large companies paid individuals to stake claims and quickly acquired huge tracts of land at prices that were well below their actual value. Later amendments to the act made the acquisition of western land by large companies even easier.

The dreams of small prospectors fared little better than those of small farmers. Major discoveries of silver and gold in Colorado and Nevada drew miners to the Rockies and eastern Sierras in the 1860s, as did subsequent discoveries in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and the Black Hills of Dakota. Unlike the veins of precious metals that had been found in California, however, those in Colorado and Nevada often ran three thousand feet deep or more and required extensive capital and technology to retrieve. As a result, individual prospectors who discovered veins of gold or silver, such as Nevada's spectacular Comstock Lode, were rapidly displaced by mining companies. These enterprises employed large numbers of wage-earning miners in impersonal (and often unsafe) settings. The subsequent industrialization of hard rock mining, the emergence of powerful mining syndicates, and the movement of independent prospectors into the ranks of wage-earning employees stood in stark contrast to the dream of a free and open West.

The development of hard rock mining also had devastating effects on the environment. In 1866, Congress passed the Mineral Act, which granted title to millions of acres of western land to mining companies, assuring their control over mineral deposits. Six years later, the Apex Mining Act gave rights to the entire vein of ore below the surface to the "individual" who discovered its apex (the point closest to the surface). Because large corporations already owned the land on which most apexes were discovered, mining companies could now freely blast through mountains as they worked the entire span of a particular vein. Trees that had not already been decimated by the passage of thousands of pioneers, by massive cattle drives, or by the movement of Indians into previously unoccupied lands were either felled for lumber to build deep mine shafts or lost in the efforts to demolish the rocky terrain in order to reach the rich ore below. Huge piles of broken rock, deep and dangerous abandoned shafts, and polluted lakes and streams were left in the wake of such operations as mining companies depleted a vein and moved on.

American Indians and Mexican Americans Fight for Autonomy During the 1860s, the dreams of American Indians as well as their lands were being destroyed. The rapid spread of railroads, mining companies, cattle ranchers, and settlers across the Plains and Far West led to violent conflict not only between tribal peoples and settlers from the East, but also among the various tribes themselves. These incursions pushed Sioux, Pawnee, Apache, Navajo, Comanche, and other native peoples off their ancestral lands and forced them into greater contact with one another. Nomadic tribes that had survived by hunting now overran lands on which other groups had settled to farm. As more and more American Indians were crowded into smaller and smaller areas, some tribes raided the stores and

fields of others, touching off a series of mini-wars. Old animosities, such as those between the Navajo and the Mescalero Apache, flared when the U.S. government forced hostile groups to share the same reservation.

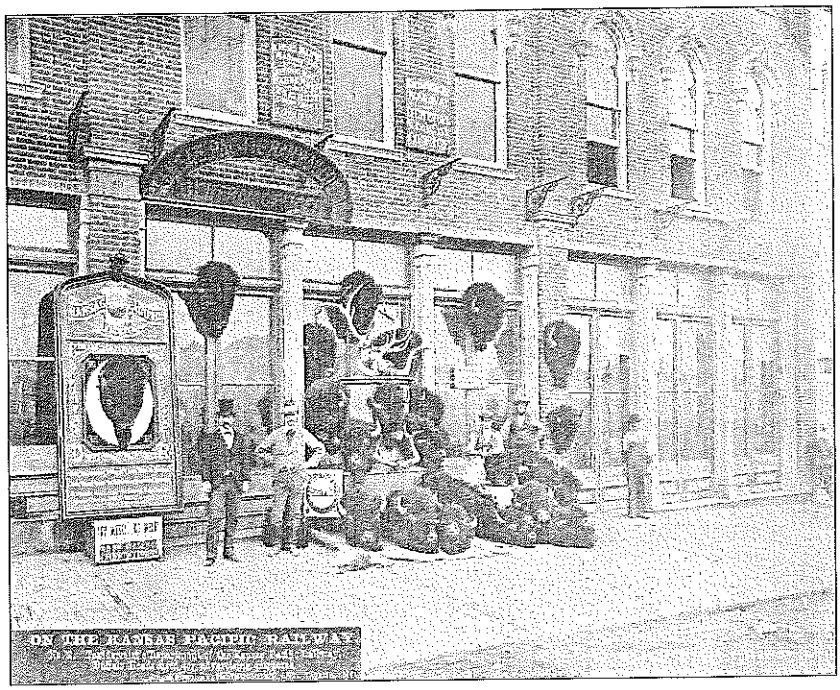
The clashes among the western tribes and between them and the growing numbers of white settlers ensured that the federal government would bolster the U.S. Army's presence on the Plains. Between 1860 and 1865, the number of U.S. troops stationed in the West increased from 11,000 to nearly 20,000. The battle at Apache Pass in 1862 in what is now Arizona and the campaigns against the Mescalero Apache, Navajo, and Sioux in 1863 in the New Mexico territory made it clear that not even the Civil War could deter the U.S. government's plans to conquer the West. In 1864, U.S. soldiers brutally attacked a sleeping village at Sand Creek, Colorado, killing some 200 Cheyenne—two-thirds of them women and children. As news of the massacre reached other Indian communities, confrontations with white settlers escalated.

In the spring of 1865, as the last battles of the Civil War were being fought, the Union Army mounted a new offensive on the Plains. Political leaders in Washington, D.C., now viewed the pacification or elimination of native societies as a necessary condition for the development of the West's economic potential. Army officers who were sent to quell uprisings included hardened veterans of the Civil War, men such as William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan, firm believers in the kind of total war against enemy populations that had proven so successful against the Confederacy. In 1867, Sherman assumed command of the Plains division of the U.S. Army.

Also in 1867, Congress declared a new policy that it claimed would ensure peace. Although treaties that had been signed in the 1830s pledged much of the Great Plains to tribal peoples, the federal government now withdrew that pledge. The remaining "free" Indians would now be concentrated on two reservations in the Dakota and Oklahoma territories. Officials persuaded a number of tribal leaders to accept the new terms, and many American Indians felt that they had little choice.

This did not mean that Indians viewed the new reservations as a benefit. An Apache named Daklugie moved as a child to the San Carlos Reservation in the Arizona territory in the early 1870s. Interviewed in the 1940s, he recalled San Carlos as a terrible place: "The heat was terrible. The insects were terrible. The water was terrible." Cacti and mosquitoes thrived on the reservation, and many Apache died of the "shaking sickness"—malaria. Daklugie concluded that San Carlos was "considered a good place for Apaches—a good place for them to die."

Still, many Indians resisted the drastic reduction of their lands and, even worse, the destruction of their nomadic culture by the boundaries of the reservation system. To give just one example, an Apache warrior,



Ride the Train and Shoot a Buffalo!

One of the short-lived attractions of western railroad travel was the opportunity to join a buffalo hunt — often without having to leave the comfort of the railroad carriage. In this 1870 promotional photograph, the official taxidermist displayed his wares outside of the Kansas Pacific Railroad's general offices. Richard Benecke, Kansas & Pacific Railroad Album — Collection Number: Ag1982.0086.0060. DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University.

Victorio, led a group off the San Carlos reservation in the 1870s. He declared, "We prefer to die in our own land under the tall cool pines. We will leave our bones with those of our people. It is better to die fighting than to starve." Eventually, this band of Apache were chased into Mexico, where Victorio and many of his followers were killed in a two-day battle in Chihuahua. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, these "nontreaty" Indians conducted guerrilla warfare against white settlers and U.S. troops. But U.S. soldiers resisted their attempts to circumvent the reservation system.

The battle to subdue Indians in the West was fought on many fronts. In 1869, the same year that Sherman was appointed commander of the entire U.S. Army, the *Army Navy Journal* reported his suggestion for undermining Indian culture. Sherman remarked that "the quickest way to compel the Indians to settle down to civilized life was to send ten regiments of soldiers to the plains, with orders to shoot buffaloes until they became too scarce to support the redskins." The bison that roamed the West in giant herds provided the raw material for survival among nomadic tribes, and their destruction would be fully as devastating as open warfare. The army regularly staged buffalo "hunts" by soldiers and civilians and applauded soldiers who reported large kills. "Sportsmen," many outfitted at army posts, also killed many buffalo on the northern plains, as did railroad crews in search of meat. Professional hunters joined the slaughter after a Pennsylvania tannery discovered in 1871 that buffalo hides could be used for commercial

"This Was to Be Our Land Forever": A Cheyenne Remembers Losing Her Land

Iron Teeth, a Cheyenne woman, provided a vivid account of the conflicts that arose in the 1870s between federal troops and the Indian tribes they were trying to relocate.

Soldiers built forts in our Powder River country when I was about thirty-two years old. The Sioux and the Cheyennes settled at the White River agency, in our favorite Black Hills country. This was to be our land forever, so we were pleased. But white people found gold on our lands [in 1874]. They crowded in, so we had to move out. My husband was angry about it, but he said the only thing we could do was go to other lands offered to us. We did this.

Many Cheyennes and Sioux would not stay on the new reservations, but went back to the old hunting grounds in Montana. Soldiers went there to fight them. In the middle of the summer [1876] we heard that all of the soldiers [led by General George A. Custer] had been killed at the Little Bighorn River. My husband said we should go and join our people there. We went, and all of our people spent the remainder of the summer there, hunting, not bothering any white people nor wanting to see any of them. When the leaves fell, the Cheyenne camp was located on a small creek far up the Powder River.

Soldiers came [on November 29, 1876] and fought us there. Crows, Pawnees, Shoshones, some Arapahoes, and other Indians were with them. They killed our men, women, and children, whichever ones might be hit by their bullets. We who could do so ran away. My husband and my two sons helped in fighting off the soldiers and enemy Indians. My husband was walking, leading his horse, and stopping at times to shoot. Suddenly I saw him fall. I started to go back to him, but my sons made me go on, with my three daughters. The last time I ever saw [my husband], he was lying there dead in the snow. From the hilltops we Cheyennes saw our lodges and everything in them burning.

Thomas B. Marquis, "Red Ripe's Squaw: Recollections of a Long Life," *Century Magazine*, 118 (June, 1929), 201–202, 206–207.

leather. By the mid-1880s, buffalo—which had once numbered over thirteen million—had all but disappeared from the Great Plains.

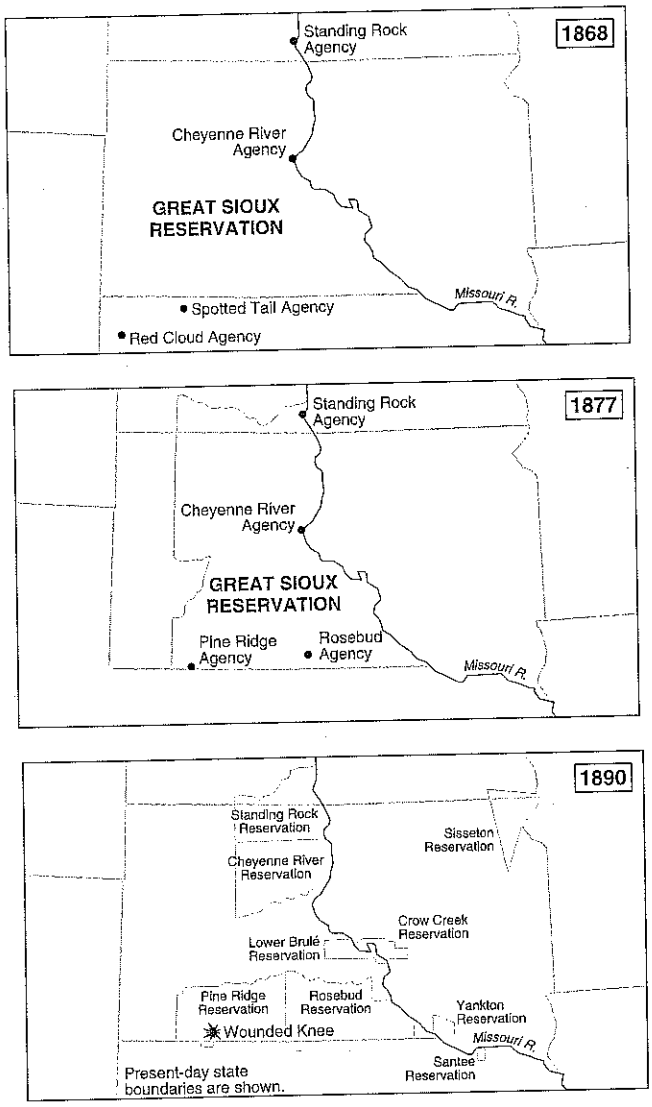
With the slaughter of the buffalo, the constant movement to either avoid or confront U.S. army troops, the periodic massacres of whole villages, the concentration of more diverse tribes in ever-smaller territories, and the disruption of normal patterns of hunting, agriculture, and trade, many Indian tribes found it impossible to sustain traditional ways of life. Others, whether within the confines of a reservation or amid the hazards of traveling the Plains, worked hard to maintain some aspects of their religious ceremonies and kinship ties and their sense of themselves as a sovereign nation.

Battle of the Little Bighorn
This is part of a series of pictures drawn by the Sioux warrior Red Horse recording his memories of the 1876 battle, drawn five years later at the Cheyenne River Agency. Tenth Annual Report, Bureau of Ethnology, #4700 — National Anthropological Archive, Smithsonian Institution.

The pacification of the American Indians was not an easy process, and Indians fought back even when they were badly outnumbered and literally outgunned. One of the most notable stands made by Indians to fight off the U.S. Army's control of the West was that of the Sioux and Cheyenne at the Battle of Little Big Horn, noted earlier in the chapter. The Sioux had begun openly resisting the reservation system in the mid-1870s when white miners had rushed into the Black Hills, the site of the Sioux reservation, after gold was discovered there. In late June 1876, just a week before the nation celebrated its centennial, General George Custer and the U.S. Seventh Cavalry were attempting to ferret out rebellious Sioux (led by chiefs Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse) when Custer stumbled into a Sioux camp. Though taken by surprise, the Sioux, with the aid of Cheyenne camped nearby, won a major victory when they cut down Custer's troops and kept possible reinforcements pinned down on a nearby bluff.

The news of the battle finally reached Philadelphia just as the Centennial Exposition opened in July. Unable to imagine that the fault lay with Custer, many visitors to the Exposition viewed the defeat at Little Big Horn as further evidence of Indian savagery. In any event, the victory was short-lived. Facing a shortage of food and supplies and the certainty that the army would send fresh troops to avenge Custer's loss, the Sioux and Cheyenne headed north. By fall 1877, U.S. Army troops had captured the renegade leaders and defeated the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, forcing these once powerful tribes back onto reservations that continued to shrink in the face of white interest in settling the Dakota territory (Map 13.1).

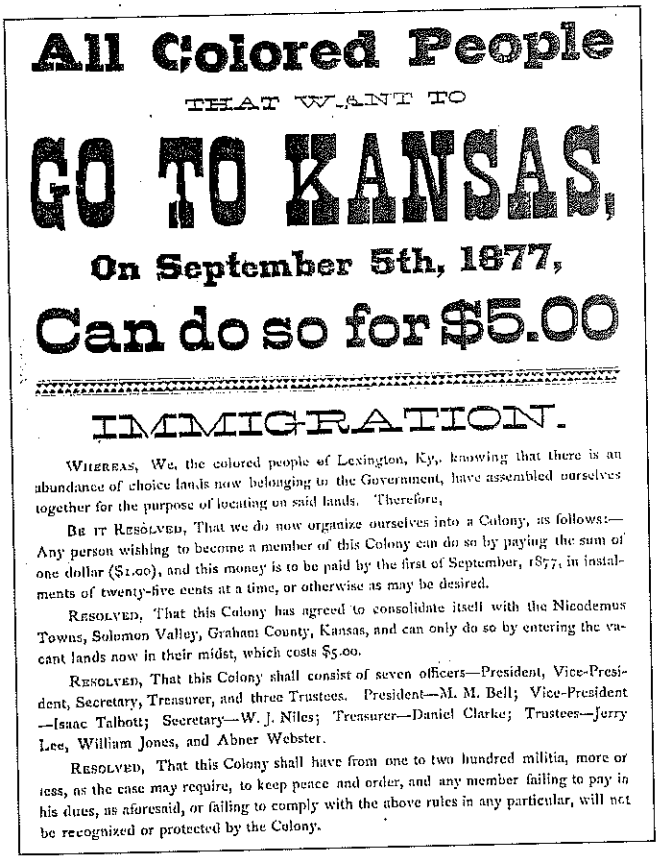
Another group that had long been settled in the West—Mexicans and Mexican Americans—also found their ways of life changed by the entrance



MAP 13.1 Reduction of the Great Sioux Reservation, 1868–1890

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, signed between the Sioux Indians and the U.S. government, assured that the Sioux would henceforth confine themselves to a reservation, but it was a substantial reservation that covered roughly the western half of present-day South Dakota, with a portion also crossing the border into western North Dakota. With the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, however, the Sioux were forced to cede more territory, narrowing the lands on which they lived. A decade later, representatives of the federal government claimed that the Sioux, who had been forced to shift from holding land in common to individual homesteads and from hunting to farming, were not using much of the land that had been granted them. In February 1890, President Benjamin Harrison stunned Sioux leaders by announcing a new agreement that broke up the existing reservation into six smaller reservations and opened the remaining land to white settlement. Reductions in food rations, epidemic disease, and a summer drought made 1890 one of the most devastating years in Sioux history.

of large numbers of eastern whites into the region. For instance, people who had once lived in settled villages along the Mexico-U.S. border were forced to migrate ever longer distances to find work. During the 1860s and 1870s, Mexican American villagers established farming communities as far north as southern Colorado. The railroad, which had just begun to extend its reach into the Southwest in this period, offered seasonal wage labor for men in the region. This was new but also beneficial, providing a critical supplement to sheep raising and petty trade. Mexican and Mexican American women, who had traditionally been considered economic partners with their husbands and sons and shared the use of communal pasturelands, continued to do so. Thus, although the expansion of the Anglo fron-



All Colored People

THAT WANT TO

GO TO KANSAS,

On September 5th, 1877,

Can do so for $5.00

IMMIGRATION.

WHEREAS, We, the colored people of Lexington, Ky., knowing that there is an abundance of choice lands now belonging to the Government, have assembled ourselves together for the purpose of locating on said lands. Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That we do now organize ourselves into a Colony, as follows:—Any person wishing to become a member of this Colony can do so by paying the sum of one dollar ($1.00), and this money is to be paid by the first of September, 1877, in instalments of twenty-five cents at a time, or otherwise as may be desired.

RESOLVED, That this Colony has agreed to consolidate itself with the Nicodemus Towns, Solomon Valley, Graham County, Kansas, and can only do so by entering the vacant lands now in their midst, which costs $5.00.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall consist of seven officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and three Trustees. President—M. M. Bell; Vice-President—Isaac Talbott; Secretary—W. J. Niles; Treasurer—Daniel Clarke; Trustees—Jerry Lee, William Jones, and Abner Webster.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall have from one to two hundred militia, more or less, as the case may require, to keep peace and order, and any member failing to pay in his dues, as aforesaid, or failing to comply with the above rules in any particular, will not be recognized or protected by the Colony.

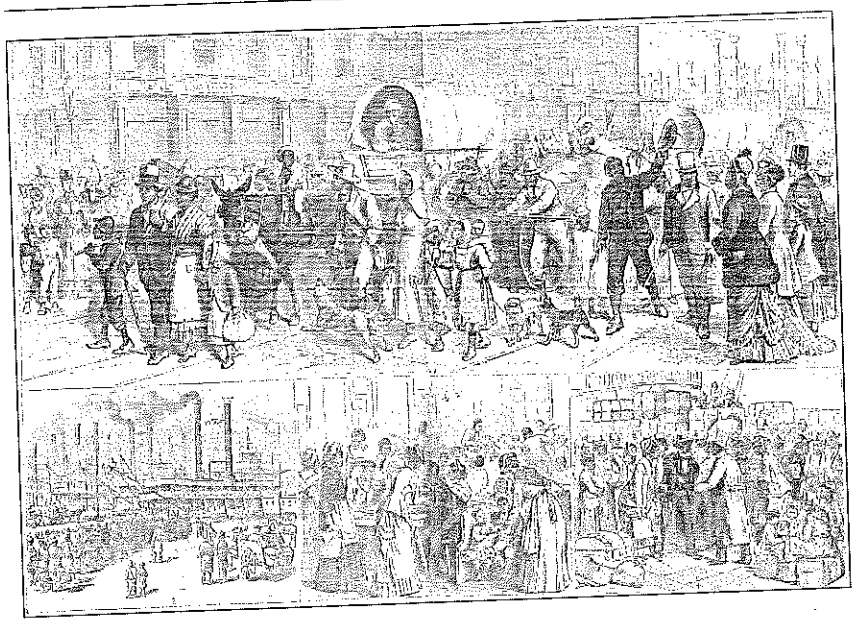
Exodusters

An 1877 handbill urged African Americans to leave Kentucky and join a new settlement in Kansas. Kansas State Historical Society.

tier in the 1870s transformed Mexican American ways of life, the negative effects of wage labor and private property were not yet widespread.

Mexican Americans faced problems, however, from the ongoing efforts by white politicians to establish racial supremacy. The majority of white settlers in the Southwest had migrated from the former Confederacy, and they sought to use the Black Codes that had been developed in the South to restrict the political and economic rights of Mexican Americans. In addition, Mexicans and Mexican Americans had intermarried with various American Indian groups during the centuries when they occupied the same region. The tribal peoples who had developed kinship ties with Mexican Americans may well have tried to bring members of their families into settled villages as an alternative to reservation life. But Mexican Americans were wary of becoming embroiled in the bitter warfare between the U.S. Army and Indians. By the 1870s, forts were scattered across the New Mexico and Arizona territories, from which army units did battle with renegade members of the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache tribes. These Indian rebels, whose homes were in the Southwest, threatened to bring the fighting into Mexican American villages, increasing the disruptions initiated by white settlement, mining companies, and the railroads.

African Americans Seek Opportunity in the West Although relations between white Americans and Indians or Mexican Americans made clear that the West was no racial utopia, many African Americans rightly viewed the region as providing greater opportunities than the unreconstructed South did. Benjamin Singleton, for example, had been born into slavery in 1809 near Nashville, Tennessee, escaped to Detroit, Michigan, in the 1850s and then returned to Nashville to work as a carpenter after the Civil War. Although he had more resources than most newly emancipated blacks did, even his hopes for a peaceful life as a free worker in the South were dashed. As Singleton watched former masters force African Americans into wage labor or sharecropping during the late 1860s, he decided that the best hope for southern blacks was land ownership, preferably outside the South.



En Route to Kansas
While many newspapers described the southern African American migrants as desperate and destitute refugees, pictorial coverage emphasized the organization and orderliness of the migration, as exemplified in this engraving showing the arrival of Exodusters in St. Louis, Missouri, during 1879. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 19, 1879 — American Social History Project.

In 1871, Singleton founded the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association to recruit African Americans for emigration to Kansas. Kansas held great promise for freedpeople. The state contained vast tracts of undeveloped farmland that, under provisions of the federal Homestead Act, could be obtained in 160-acre lots for $1.25 per acre. Kansas was well known as a home to ardent abolitionists and as the site where the first black soldiers joined the Union Army. The Republican Party dominated the political life of postwar Kansas, and the state legislature had been one of the first to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. In addition, many white Quakers, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists from the Northeast, with a "sense of mission toward the Negro," had moved to Kansas during the 1860s, ensuring a warm welcome for freedpeople.

But by 1878, when Singleton arrived in Kansas with the first party of 200 African American emigrants, the railroad companies and speculators had already claimed the best land. The black homesteaders had to settle on less fertile lands, but even that proved difficult when, a year later, the Kansas Freedman's Relief Association sent 400 new settlers to the same area to which Singleton and his followers had gone. Because the plots that were offered to African Americans were too small to sustain families, many of the new settlers ended up working for wages for white ranchers and large farmers or moving into local towns, where most could find only menial employment.

There were still advantages for African Americans who moved West. Western states and territories were less likely to pass Black Codes, and some African Americans gained economic and political rights that were denied

"A Strong Desire to Emigrate to Kansas"

In this letter to the National Emigrant Aid Society, a group of North Carolina freedpeople lists their reasons for wanting to migrate to Kansas.

August 1, 1879

We the people of the 2nd congressional district, North Carolina, have a Strong Desire to Emigrate to Kansas Land Where we can Have a Home. Reason and why:

1. We have not our rights in law.
2. The old former masters do not allow us anything for our labor.
3. We have not our Right in the Election. We are defrauded by our former masters.
4. We have not no [right] to make and honest and humble living.
5. There is no use for the Colored to go to law after their Rights; not one out of 50 gets his Rights.
6. The Ku [Klux] Reigns. . . .
7. We Want to Get to a land Where we can Vote and it not be a Crime to the Colored Voters. . . .
8. Wages is very low [here.]

Nearly all of the laborers have families to take care of and many other things we could mention, but by the help of God we intend to make our start to Kansas land. We had Rather Suffer and be free, than to suffer [the] infamous degrades that are Brought upon us [here.] . . .

Rev. S. Heath
Moses Heath
Lenoir Co., N.C.

Senate Report 693, 46th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1880).

them in the South. Moreover, the mix of Indians, Mexican Americans, Chinese immigrants, and African American and white settlers ensured that no single racial group became the sole focus of racial hostilities. In some cases, other racial groups—such as the Chinese in California or the Comanche and Apache in New Mexico—bore the brunt of labor exploitation and political oppression. Still, while opportunities for blacks in the West were greater than those in the South, they were still severely restricted.

Industrialization and the Working Class

The railroads and mining companies that transformed life in the West also contributed to the acceleration of industrial growth after the Civil War. With this development, ideals of economic independence and self-sufficiency became less and less possible for most Americans to attain,

whatever their race and whatever the region in which they lived. In 1860, there had been about as many self-employed people as wage earners. Twenty years later, far more people relied on wages. The number of workers in manufacturing and construction, for instance, leapt from two million in 1860 to more than four million in 1880 (Figure 13.1). The rise of big business in the late nineteenth century was thus accompanied by the emergence of an industrial labor force that included women and men from a wide range of ethnic and racial groups. The very diversity of this new labor force, however, made it difficult for workers to organize in the face of increasing demands and pressures from employers.

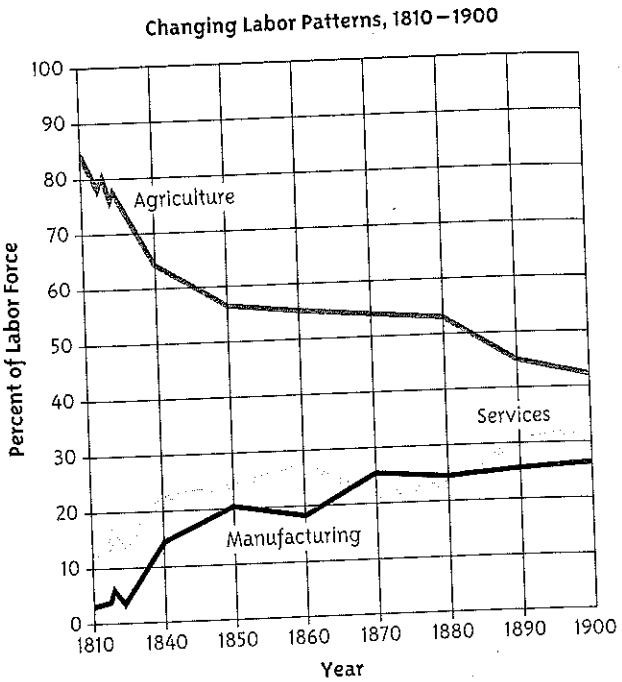


FIGURE 13.1 Changing Labor Patterns, 1810–1900
Although agriculture continued to employ the largest percentage of the workforce throughout the nineteenth century, both the number and the proportion of women and men working in manufacturing and service increased steadily. The Civil War was an important catalyst for this industrial leap, increasing the demand for guns, uniforms, shoes, and other war materiel. In the postwar period, textile factories multiplied exponentially in both the North and the South. Laborers in the service category grew as a result of both the war and the expanding urban population. Government clerical workers, typists in city offices and factories, and sales clerks joined those workers who had long been employed in service such as domestic servants and laundresses.

The Rise of Big Business The railroads were central to changes in the very fabric of American economic life. Through large subsidies to the railroads, the federal government helped to create powerful corporations, which became America's first big businesses. The Pennsylvania Railroad, the nation's largest single business enterprise, employed over 20,000 workers by the early 1870s. The railroads' tremendous need for capital led them to adopt and popularize a variety of modern managerial methods. One was the limited-liability corporation, which allowed wealthy men to buy shares in new ventures while limiting their financial responsibilities if the business failed. The number of railroad stockholders expanded exponentially, and large boards of directors — usually including several powerful bankers — replaced old-fashioned individual entrepreneurs. This new separation of ownership and control gave the railroad corporation a permanence and impersonality that had previously been unknown, which made it more difficult for workers to negotiate problems and express their grievances.

The railroads were also the first businesses to face the problem of intense economic competition. This led periodically to disastrous rate wars. In some areas, groups of railroads formed "pools" that tried to end cutthroat competition by setting rates and dividing up traffic. From the standpoint of the railroad managers, pools seemed essential to survival. To other people, such practices undermined the "free competition" that some lauded as the key to American prosperity. Critics contrasted the bankruptcy of some companies with the rise of a small group of wealthy entrepreneurs who had built immense personal fortunes through railroad promotion and

"Money Monopolies": William Sylvis on Workers and the Vote

In this 1868 speech to the Labor Reform Party Convention, Iron Molders' Union president William Sylvis rails against the power of "money monopolies" and implores workers to use their vote to regain their rights and restore the virtue of the American republic.

Men talk to me of our independence and boast of our constitutional government, and all that it guarantees to us; but with these spread-eagle gentlemen I do not agree. These things will do very well for Fourth-of-July orations, but not for everyday life. Workingmen do not live in imagination, but upon cold, practical facts; and the facts are, that the workingmen of this nation are oppressed more than the same class in any other country. It is true, we have no king—no political king—but here we have monopolies, banking monopolies, railroad monopolies, land monopolies, and bond monopolies, that supply the place of kings, dukes, lords, etc., and their rule is getting to be more intolerable than is found anywhere else. If we have no political kings, we have money kings, and they are the worst kings in the world. We, by our labor, have been putting into motion millions of little streams of wealth, and a false financial and money system has been directing them into the pockets of a few individuals, while we remain poor and powerless. No, not powerless, for we have yet one way of escape. The ballot-box is still open. We in this State have yet no law allowing the Legislature to do our voting for us. If we will use the ballot effectively, we will soon be freed from the golden rule that now crushes the vitality out of the industry of the whole nation. This we are now trying to do. This is the object of the Labor Reform Party; and we are ready to make common cause with any other party or people who will adopt our principles and get on our platform.

James C. Sylvis, *The Life, Speeches, Labors, and Essays of William H. Sylvis* (1872).

consolidation. In the eyes of critics, these men—including Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, Jim Fisk, and Collis P. Huntington, who together became known as the Robber Barons—symbolized all that was wrong with the capitalist system.

The industrial barons rapidly translated their economic might into political power. They hired armies of lobbyists whose activities gained the corporations even more subsidies and land grants and protected them from regulation and taxation. "The galleries and lobbies of every legislature," observed a Republican leader, "are thronged with men seeking . . . an advantage" for one corporation or another. These developments made many Americans doubt the future of their nation. Having fought a civil war to destroy the power of one ruling class, Americans were now confronted with an even more powerful industrial oligarchy. This new power was emerging

in part as a result of the rapid and uncontrolled development of the West, the very region where the dream of a free and open republic should have been fulfilled.

Railroads, which led in the development of big business, were vital in the opening up of the West. They developed the rapid, reliable shipping that was needed to create a truly national market. This development, in turn, encouraged manufacturers to produce in larger quantities and to experiment with low-cost mass-production methods. Small producers that had once dominated local markets now faced competition from products that were made in distant factories and hauled by railroads to every corner of the United States. By the late nineteenth century, carriages, wagons, furniture, and other wood products, as well as shoes, textiles, and cereals, were all mass-produced.

The American Frankenstein
Inspired by Mary Shelley's novel about a human-made monster who turned on its creator, this cartoon depicted the railroad trampling the rights of the American people. "Agriculture, commerce, and manufacture are all in my power," the monster roared in the cartoon's caption. "My interest is the higher law of American politics." Frank Bellew, *New York Daily Graphic*, April 14, 1874 — American Social History Project.

The most dynamic industries, such as oil refining, were those that were involved in processing the natural resources of the rapidly developing West. In 1859, Edwin Drake drilled America's first oil well in Pennsylvania. The lucrative business of refining crude oil grew up in the cities of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, leading to a period of intense competition similar to that which plagued the railroads. John D. Rockefeller, whose Standard Oil Company dominated the Cleveland petroleum business by 1871, saw this competition as the main problem facing the industry. Rather than supporting price-fixing pools like those used by railroad companies, Rockefeller brought pressure on smaller refiners to sell out to him. By the late 1870s, Standard Oil was a virtual monopoly, controlling about nine-tenths of the nation's oil-refining capacity.

The Growth of Cities and a National Industrial Workforce As industries grew, so did the need for workers. Many workers were still laboring in their homes under the old outwork system. Sewing women in particular still produced clothing the old-fashioned way in the tenements of New York, Boston, and Chicago. Women outworkers also made paper flowers, cigars, and buttons, and many male tailors worked at home as well. Still, increased

demand for such products did not improve the lives of these workers. For instance, between 1860 and 1880, textile manufacturers insisted that women homeworkers buy or rent newly invented sewing machines to speed up their work. Contractors then lowered the prices paid to the women for each piece of work completed, arguing that it was now easier to produce more. "I have worked from dawn to sundown, not stopping to get one mouthful of food, for twenty-five cents," reported a woman tailor in 1868.

Yet it was the factory, not the outwork system, that represented the wave of the future. The history of shoemaking in Lynn, Massachusetts, is typical. As the national market expanded along with transportation and population, the outwork system seemed less efficient. The idea of concentrating workers in shoemaking factories was made possible with the invention of the McKay stitcher (an adaptation of the sewing machine) in 1862. The McKay stitcher allowed manufacturers to employ more machine operators, centralize production, and thus end outwork. Discipline became tighter, and work was performed more steadily. "The men and boys are working as if for life," observed a visitor to one Lynn factory. So were the women and girls.

During this period, factory cities such as Lynn were extremely dynamic. A similar city—Paterson, New Jersey—grew from a market town of 11,000 people in 1850 into a sprawling city of over 33,000 by 1873. Many of its residents labored in the new locomotive, iron, machinery, and textile industries. In the late 1860s, industry grew faster in smaller cities such as Lynn and Paterson than in large cities such as New York and Boston. Industrial centers began to emerge in the South as well. In Augusta, Georgia, for instance, textile factories provided work for growing numbers of families—especially widows and their daughters—in the aftermath of the Civil War. By the 1870s, textile factories were opening across the South. Between the mid-1870s and the mid-1880s, six new mills opened in Augusta alone, and the workforce jumped from 700 to 3,000 workers.

Cities in the Midwest and Far West grew impressively as well. Chicago, which had 30,000 people in 1850, became the sixth-largest city in the world a mere forty years later, with a population of over one million. Linked by the spreading railroad network, cities such as St. Louis, Cleveland, and San Francisco also grew tremendously. The modern American city emerged in the first decade after the Civil War. During these years, city governments began to deliver services to their citizens, including public transportation, professional fire and police protection, and rudimentary sanitation and health facilities.

The Spread of Immigration Large cities, with their expanding services and job opportunities, also attracted the most immigrants. Immigration had slowed during the Civil War. Now it picked up again—this time on an

even more massive scale. About five million people entered the United States between 1815 and 1860, but more than double that number came between 1860 and 1890. As before, most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe, where agricultural crises prompted them to leave home. Tens of thousands of farm people, including many Irish families, emigrated to the New World in the decade following the Civil War. Not all immigrants in this period were from the countryside, however; coal miners from Scotland and Wales and iron puddlers from England's Black Country brought crucial skills to the most dynamic sectors of the American economy. German immigrants worked as laborers and artisans in more traditional trades, such as baking, brewing, and upholstering. They made up the majority of skilled craftsmen in St. Louis, Chicago, and other large cities.

Most immigrants, however, ended up working in the least-skilled sectors of the workforce: hauling and loading and unloading goods on the docks and in warehouses, building roads and streetcar lines, and laboring at building sites. Most important, it was overwhelmingly immigrants who built America's railroad network—especially the Irish in the East and the Chinese in the West.

Chinese immigration to the Pacific Coast had surged in the 1850s, when famine in China had triggered an exodus to California. By 1860, nearly one Californian in ten was Chinese. When the Central Pacific began to build the western end of the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s, it recruited laborers directly from China. Its agents paid a person's outfitting and passage in return for a $75 promissory note, the debt to be repaid within seven months of beginning work on the railroad. However, new debts—for food, housing, and other necessities—generally replaced old ones. Thus, for most immigrants, their chances for financial independence receded into the distance right along with the railroad tracks. Despite the hardships, over 10,000 Chinese laborers found their way to the grading camps and construction crews of the Central Pacific.

As the United States extended its reach into the Pacific—purchasing Alaska from the Russians and annexing the Midway Islands in 1867—the Chinese continued to migrate eastward. By 1870, more than one in four people living in the Idaho territory was Chinese (Table 13.2). In mining towns, the Chinese had established their own communities and built businesses, particularly laundries. This allowed some to work for themselves rather than for American employers. Virginia City, Nevada, for instance, was home to about 1,000 Chinese immigrants and twenty Chinese laundries in the mid-1870s. Whether working in mining towns or on the railroads, Chinese men, isolated from their families, struggled to survive the most brutal work conditions then known in the United States. In the winter of 1866, heavy snows covered the Chinese encampments in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The laborers had to dig chimneys and air shafts through the

TABLE 13.2 Chinese in the Western Mining Areas, 1870

The U.S. Census of 1870 demonstrated the massive impact Chinese men had on the mining industry. Their labor was critical to extracting the enormous mineral wealth of the western states and, in the process, providing raw materials for the entire nation's industrial development. Moreover, the number of miners represents only part of the contribution of Chinese immigrants to western and national economic growth. The Chinese also contributed by building railroads and serving as cooks, storekeepers, and laundry and domestic workers in the mining areas. John Kuo Wei Tchen, *The Chinese of America* (1980).

Chinese in Western Mining Areas (1870)

State or Territory	Total Mining Workforce	Chinese Miners	Percentage
Oregon	3,965	2,428	61.2%
Idaho	6,579	3,853	58.5%
Washington	173	44	25.4%
California	36,339	9,087	25.0%
Montana	6,720	1,415	21.0%
Nevada	8,241	240	2.9%

snow and live by lantern light. Yet under orders from Charles Crocker, who directed labor for the Central Pacific, construction continued. On Christmas Day, 1866, a local newspaper reported that "a gang of Chinamen employed by the railroad were covered up by a snow slide and four or five died before they could be exhumed." Even when not facing such dangers, the Chinese labored for ten grueling hours a day at roughly two-thirds the wages paid to whites. The experience of the Chinese in America at this time was harsher than that of other immigrant groups — partly because they were "contract laborers" and were recruited on a basis much like that of the indentured servants of the colonial period.

The dramatic increase in immigrants and wage laborers and the enormous expansion of industry and wealth raised fundamental questions about the survival of traditional American ideals and values. Business leaders and their intellectual supporters tried to create a rationale for these vast changes in American economic and social life by combining two concepts: "laissez-faire" and "Social Darwinism." The theory of laissez-faire (which means, roughly, "leave it alone" in French) rested on a belief that economic growth could result only from the free and unregulated development of a market that was governed entirely by laws of supply and demand and kept free from any interference by government or unions. Social Darwinism applied British scientist Charles Darwin's ideas about the evolution of biological species to social relations. Its proponents used Darwin's concept of "the survival of the fittest" to explain the economic success of a few capitalists ("the strong") and the increasing impoverishment of many workers ("the weak"). They argued that this "natural" process resulted in society's continuing improvement.

Not all Americans agreed. Even the generally conservative *New York Times* expressed concern in 1869 that the increasingly rapid descent of the independent mechanic to the level of a dependent wage earner was

On Stampede Pass, After the Blizzard

Chinese workers constructing a tunnel on the Northern Pacific Railway were photographed sometime in the 1880s as they cleared a switchback (a zigzag, uphill road) in the Cascade Mountains of Washington. Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries.

producing "a system of slavery as absolute if not as degrading as that which lately prevailed [in] the South." In the North, the *Times* noted, "capitalists threaten to become the masters, and it is the white laborers who are to be slaves." More than any other single fact, the development of industrial capitalism and the attendant deterioration of working conditions lay behind the rapid growth of the American labor movement in the years after the Civil War.

An American Labor Movement Emerges

The period from 1866 to 1873 marked a new stage in the development of the American labor movement. A greater proportion of industrial workers joined trade unions during these years than in any other period in the nineteenth century, and more of them than ever belonged to unions that were national rather than local in scope. By 1872, there were thirty national trade unions in the United States and hundreds of local ones, with a total membership of over 300,000 workers.

The efforts to create more and larger unions was limited, however, by the refusal of many white working men to organize alongside African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and women. Then in 1873, a devastating panic swept the nation, shattering the hopes of workers and unions. Still, before the country had fully recovered from the Panic of 1873, workers in one key industry—railroads—managed to launch a massive strike. Although the Great Uprising of 1877 failed to achieve workers' demands, the strike sug-

gested the power of collective national action to gain leverage for labor against the giants of industrial capitalism.

Workers Organize Trade unions emerged in the 1860s out of a series of intense local struggles with employers over wages, hours, and working conditions. The struggle to limit the length of the workday to eight hours was especially important, and it triggered union organization in a number of trades. Workers' ideological traditions also helped to spark the labor upsurge. Native-born workers, white and black, drew on the egalitarian ideals and republican traditions of the American Revolution and the early years of Reconstruction in building both individual unions and the labor movement as a whole. German, Irish, and British immigrants carried with them from their home countries new, often radical, ideas about collective action and forms of struggle and organization, including socialism and anarchism. The melding of these traditions shaped the politics and ideology of the post–Civil War American labor movement.

The National Molders' Union, founded in 1859, became one of the most important of the new unions. The power of the iron molders lay in their possession of valuable skills in a rapidly expanding industry. Led by president William H. Sylvis, they were also deeply committed to an egalitarian legacy. "We assume to belong to the order of men who know their rights, and knowing, dare maintain them," proclaimed a Troy, New York, molder. The iron molders had organized locals during the inflation-ridden Civil War, most notably among Chicago's giant McCormick reaper workers. Through a series of successful strikes, the union managed to maintain its members' real wages and even obtain wage increases for the unskilled workers in the plant. By 1867, the molders' union stood at the head of efforts to shorten the workday to eight hours.

Manufacturers were unified in their opposition to labor's demand for a shorter work day. "As long as the present order of things exists, there will be poor men and women who will be obliged to work," noted one employer who wanted to maintain a ten-hour workday, "and the majority of them will not do any more than necessity compels them to do." Concerned with the effect of a shortened workday on their profits, factory owners vowed to fight the eight-hour day.

The Illinois legislature presented a major test of employers' resolve. The Republican-controlled state legislature passed a law declaring eight hours to be "the legal workday in the State," and the governor signed it into law in March 1867. Employers were required to conform to the new legislation beginning May 1. Chicago workers, elated with the seeming victory, took to the streets on May first in a spectacular parade that featured 6,000 marchers, elaborate floats, and exuberant brass bands.

Serenading a 'Blackleg' on His Return from Work

Trade union organizing in the coal industry was a family affair, as indicated by this illustration from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* showing coal miners and their families harassing a scab (strikebreaker) during a strike in the Cherry Valley region of Ohio in 1874. Jonathan Lowe, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* September 5, 1874 — American Social History Project.

Chicago employers, however, encouraged by the legislature's failure to institute a penalty for noncompliance, simply refused to comply. Workers once again took to the streets, this time in a massive citywide work stoppage, to demand that the new law be enforced. The iron molders led the way, followed by German and native-born machinists and Irish workers from the packinghouses and rolling mills. On May 6, a crowd of strikers estimated at 5,000, many of them armed, marched through the city's industrial areas, closing factories and battling police.

But the strike was badly weakened by hostility from the same politicians who had passed the law. Calling for the liberation of Chicago from "the riot element," Illinois Republicans united behind the mayor when he called out the Dearborn Light Artillery on May 7 to suppress the strikers. Chicago workers bitterly denounced Republican politicians, but by the middle of June, most workers, including the molders, had gone back to work on a ten-hour-day basis.

Coal miners also built powerful unions in this period. In 1868, miners organized an effective trade union, the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, under the leadership of Irish-born John Siney. A year later, the organization had a membership of over 30,000, including skilled and unskilled workers throughout the entire industry. By 1873, the Miners' National Association was formed, with Siney as its president, to organize all American mine workers into one great industrial union.

A third group, shoemakers, also built on traditions of struggle going back to the early 1800s. Forced into factories, they found themselves working under a new order, subjected to the control of manufacturers and

"Eight Hours and No Surrender!"

The following newspaper account describes a parade that was held in Chicago on May 1, 1867, to celebrate the passage of an Illinois law mandating an eight-hour workday. The description conveys not only a sense of the workers' elation at winning passage of the state law, but also a feeling of how momentous the victory seemed. The parade is reminiscent of similar parades of workers in support of the U.S. Constitution eighty years earlier.

MAGNIFICENT DEMONSTRATION BY CHICAGO'S WORKERS!
MOTTOES AND SLOGANS ON THE BANNERS.
THE MASS MEETINGS.

The Eight-Hour Bill became law yesterday, and to celebrate, the workers of the city turned out by thousand with bands, banners, and the badges of their trades. The demonstration was grandiose and impressive.

The procession . . . extending for more than a mile, made a deep impression on the thousands of onlookers who had gathered in the streets. . . . They covered the stairs, the windows, and even the roofs of the houses where the procession passed by. An almost countless number of banners, flags, slogans, etc. were carried by the marchers. Following are some of the mottos:

"In God We Trust."
"Eight Hours and No Surrender!"
"To the Advantage of the Next Generation."
"Illinois on the Side of Reform."
"The Workers' Millennium. . . . "

The day laborers were represented by a four-horse wagon, on which rode several day laborers with their various tools.

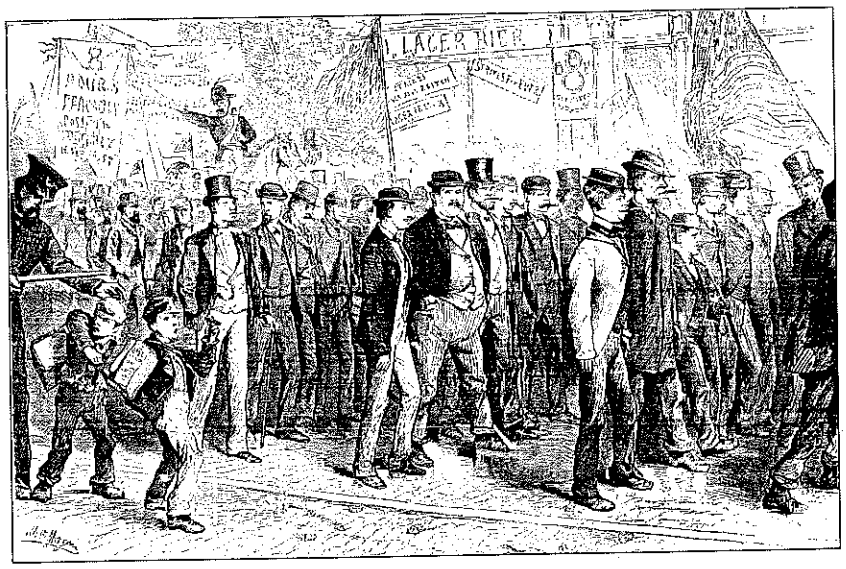
The Molders' Union participated with an eight-horse wagon on which were displayed all the materials, tools, and machinery needed for molding. . . .

Next was a delivery wagon with a coffin bearing the inscription "Death and Burial to the Ten-Hour System. . . . "

Then another delivery wagon appeared, again with a coffin on which were inscribed the words "Death and Burial of the Chicago *Times*"; above the coffin hanging from a gallows was a dummy with a veiled head.

Boston *Daily Evening Voice*, May 1, 1867.

machines. In 1867, the shoe factory workers organized the Knights of St. Crispin, named after the patron saint of shoemakers. Through a series of successful strikes, the organization grew rapidly, and by 1870, it had a membership of nearly 50,000, making it the largest labor union in the nation. Women shoe workers organized the Daughters of St. Crispin to fight what they called "the unjust encroachments upon our rights." Defying the wave of anti-Asian feeling that was sweeping the nation, the Crispins also



The Eight-Hour Movement
Workers demonstrate for the eight-hour day along New York's Bowery in June, 1872. The production of cigars (much in evidence in this engraving), one of the city's major industries, was undergoing rapid change in the 1870s as production moved from craftwork in small shops to manufacture in factories and tenement houses. Matthew Somerville Morgan, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 29, 1872 — American Social History Project.

organized a local of Chinese workers who had been brought to Massachusetts to break a shoemakers' strike in 1870.

Despite the Chinese local, however, a number of racial and ethnic groups organized into separate unions. Ethnic concentrations in particular industries or workplaces, as well as language and cultural differences, proved difficult obstacles for unions to overcome, assuming that they were even willing to make the effort. Many foreign-born workers chose to join associations organized by their countrymen. German immigrants, for instance, created separate craft unions, trades councils, and political organizations. In 1868, Adolph Douai and Friedrich Sorge established a section of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) in New York, and by 1872, there were twenty sections in the city.

Founded by the German revolutionary Karl Marx in London in 1864, the IWA held that "the final object" of the labor movement was "the abolition of all class rule." Members sought the abolition of private ownership of production and its replacement by a socialist system in which workers would hold political power. They would then run the nation's industries in a democratic fashion, allowing workers to participate in setting production quotas, wages, hours, and working conditions. German American socialists also played a leading role in the great eight-hour-day strikes. Despite the strong opposition of employers and politicians, the eight-hour strikes were partially successful, and organized socialism continued to grow.

Many native-born workers shared the German immigrants' distrust of industrial capitalism and the wage system, if not their more militant ideology. Some turned to cooperation as an alternative to capitalist competition. To circumvent the monopolistic power of the railroads, small farmers

had organized in the late 1860s local chapters of the Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, for the cooperative distribution and purchase of agricultural products. Worker-run cooperative stores and factories that mimicked the Granger co-ops appeared all over the nation in the early 1870s, particularly in textile, shoemaking, and mining towns.

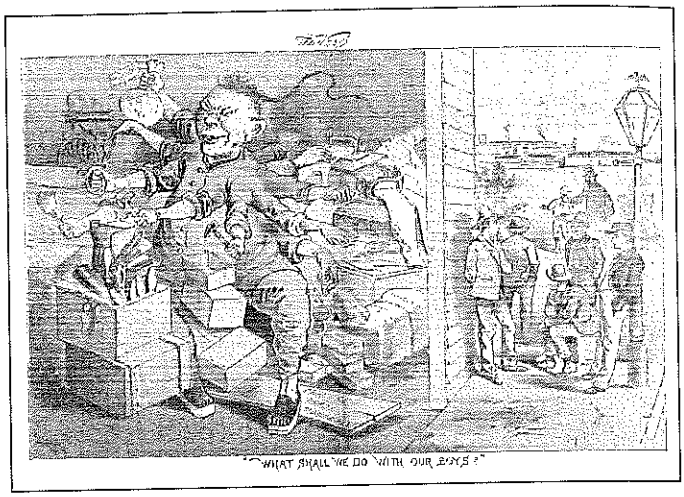
Though members of the middle class hailed cooperation as an alternative to strikes, working-class cooperatives reflected a deep dissatisfaction with the unfettered individualism that was celebrated by industrial capitalism. Cooperation, argued one advocate, would make workers "independent of the capitalist employer," end "ceaseless degradation," and establish a new civilization in which "reason directed by moral principle" would prevail and universal brotherhood would flourish. Yet it was not clear whether such a brotherhood could bring together workers of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, different skill levels, and different sexes.

Racism Stalls the Labor Movement The resurgence of working-class militancy was capped by the formation of a new federation of labor organizations, the National Labor Union (NLU), which covered workers in diverse craft and industrial occupations. It was founded in Baltimore in 1866 and was led initially by iron molder William Sylvis. The NLU marked a new stage in labor organization: the emergence of a nationwide institution that linked wage workers together in a broad community of interest. Its vision of this community was limited in crucial respects, however. Reflecting the racism and sexism of most white workingmen, the NLU condemned the Chinese and gave only lip service to the rights of African American and women workers. These very exclusions gave rise to alternative movements that both expanded organization among workers and tested the power of labor unions and the law to create a more democratic society.

Many of the trade unions that were affiliated with the NLU had policies that excluded blacks from membership, and in 1867, the NLU ground to a halt on the question of pushing these trade unions to organize African American workers. NLU head Sylvis took a pragmatic line, arguing that "if the workingmen of the white race do not conciliate the blacks, the black vote will be cast against them." But a committee that was assigned to study the question took no action, leaving black workers to fend for themselves.

African American workers had already set about creating their own labor institutions, calling the exclusion of blacks from trade unions "an insult to God and injury to us, and disgrace to humanity." In 1869, a national convention of African Americans created the Colored National Labor Union (CNLU). Led by onetime Baltimore caulker Isaac Myers, the new organization attracted the backing of Frederick Douglass and other prominent African Americans. The CNLU, like Douglass, also actively supported the Republicans, the party of Lincoln and Radical Reconstruction.

The NLU, hoping to create a working-class party, could not understand the political stance of African American workers. White labor leaders refused to recognize that the discrimination that their unions practiced had a far greater effect than did partisan differences in hindering class solidarity. At the same time, the NLU had good reasons for doubting the efficacy of labor's alliance with the Republican Party. Focusing attention on the central demand of white workers, the NLU attempted to obtain a national eight-hour-day law for industrial workers. It ran up against intense opposition not only from employers, but also from Republicans.



What Shall We Do with Our Boys?

Some of the most virulent anti-Chinese imagery of the 1870s and 1880s was published in *The Wasp*, a San Francisco illustrated satire magazine. In this cartoon, a grotesque, multi-limbed figure representing Chinese immigrant labor is shown depriving white working-class youths of jobs. George Frederick Keller, *The Wasp*, March 3, 1882 — Richard Samuel West.

Ira Steward, a self-educated Boston machinist and a leader in the eight-hour movement, met this opposition head-on. He maintained that the system of wage labor undermined freedom and civilization. Steward, a veteran of the antislavery movement, likened northern industrial capitalism to southern slavery. Just as the motive for "making a man a slave was to get his labor, or its results, for nothing," Steward argued, so "the motive for employing wage-labor is to secure some of its results for nothing." The eight-hour day, he said, would totally transform this system. As hours were shortened and wages rose, profits would decline, leading to the gradual elimination of the capitalist "as we understand him." Cooperation would replace the wage system, and "a republicanization of labor, as well as a republicanization of government" would occur.

Steward had taken a long step toward adapting the antislavery and republican traditions of thought to the new industrial age. White working people quickly took up his argument, stressing the comparison between southern racial slavery and northern "wage slavery." Only an eight-hour day would allow the worker to feel "full of life and enjoyment," asserted a Massachusetts boot maker, because "the man is no longer a slave, but a man."

Drawing this parallel to slavery, however, did not necessarily put white workers on the side of black workers. Although some farsighted leaders, such as William Sylvis, recognized the potential power of interracial coalitions, those who viewed unionization as a right for whites only drowned out calls for unity. Discrimination against Chinese workers was especially intense. Almost every important native-born labor leader opposed Chinese immigration and advocated instead the absolute exclusion of Chinese. The primary argument was that employers would use "docile" Chinese labor to lower the standard of living of U.S. workers and take away the jobs of native-born Americans.

"Narrow and Unjust": Joseph McDonnell Argues for Acceptance of Chinese Immigrants

In this 1878 editorial in the Labor Standard *attacking demands for Chinese workers to be deported, Irish-born socialist Joseph McDonnell reminds readers that the arrival of virtually every ethnic group in America had been met with the same "intolerant, silly and shameful cry" of "Go home!" Though voices like McDonnell's were exceptional, they serve as reminders that some late-nineteenth-century white Americans were able to pierce the veil of prejudice that others, including some labor leaders, erected against Asian immigrants.*

The cry that the "Chinese must go" is both narrow and unjust. It represents no broad or universal principle. It is merely a repetition of the cry that was raised years ago by native Americans against the immigration of Irishmen, Englishmen, Germans and others from European nations. It now ill becomes those, or the descendants of those, against whom this cry was raised in past years, to raise a similar tocsin against a class of foreigners who have been degraded by ages of oppression. . . . we have no right to raise a cry against any class of human beings because of their nationality. . . .

Let us organize and raise our voices against low wages and long hours. Let us use our organized power against the capitalistic combinations which carry on a slave trade between this country and China and elsewhere, by importing thousands for the purpose of reducing wages in America. Let our first stand be against those rich and intelligent thieves who strive to perpetuate and establish a system of overwork and starvation pay. And then against all those, whether they be Chinese or American, Irish or English, French or German, Spanish or Italian who refuse to co-operate with us for their good and ours, and that of the whole human family.

Unsigned editorial, "The Chinese Must Go," *Labor Standard* (New York), 30 June 1878.

The "docility" of the Chinese, like the penchant for strikebreaking among blacks, was largely mythical. In the spring of 1867, for example, thousands of Chinese railroad workers in the Sierras went on strike, demanding higher wages and an eight-hour day. Management condemned the strike as a "conspiracy" and considered the possibility of transporting 10,000 southern blacks to replace the Chinese. But Charles Crocker, who managed labor for the Central Pacific Railroad, developed a more powerful strategy, similar to Sherman's policy of slaughtering the buffalo to defeat American Indians. Crocker decided to starve the workers into submission. "I stopped the provisions on them, stopped the butchers from butchering, and used [other] such coercive measures," Crocker bragged. The strike was broken within a week.

Most white workers argued for the exclusion of the Chinese from jobs on the same grounds that they argued against African Americans: economic competition. In most cases, the issue of competition was largely illusory, since Chinese immigrants generally occupied the lowest-paying jobs at the

bottom of the employment ladder—the jobs that had largely been abandoned by whites. This fact mattered little, however, since the underlying hostility toward the Chinese had as its basis the same deep belief in racial supremacy that shaped white attitudes toward African Americans. Labor editor John Swinton, a humane working-class leader in other ways, spoke for many workers when he argued that the "Mongolian type of humanity is an inferior type—inferior in organic structure, in vital force or physical energy, and in the constitutional conditions of development." Such racial classification schemes were pervasive in the postwar period, when educated middle-class Americans used Social Darwinism and other pseudoscientific theories to justify their belief in the inevitability of their social and political dominance. Anti-Chinese sentiment was equally pervasive among white working-class labor leaders.

Working Women, Unions, and the Vote Labor leaders also strongly opposed the organization of workingwomen—even white, native-born workingwomen. Nonetheless, wage-earning women, who formed nearly one-quarter of the total nonfarm labor force in 1870, used a variety of tactics to defend and improve their conditions and wages during this period. In 1869, for example, sewing women in Boston petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to provide them with public housing. Although the legislature ignored the request, the petition broke new ground in demanding state intervention to remedy oppressive working conditions.

Many workingwomen, however, turned to trade unions rather than the state to gain protection. Female cigar makers, umbrella sewers, and textile and laundry workers all formed short-lived local unions in these years, but they received little support from white male workers. Of the thirty national unions that existed in the early 1870s, only two—the cigar makers and the printers—admitted women into their ranks and even then not on an equal basis with men. Most organized workingmen believed that the presence of women in the paid labor force was either a temporary phenomenon or, like the employment of African Americans and Chinese immigrants, part of a strategy of employers to lower wages. Clinging to the myth that "all men support all women," they kept women out of their unions in an effort to keep them out of their trades.

This opposition came to a head in 1869, when the NLU, which initially welcomed women to its ranks, expelled women's rights advocate Susan B. Anthony. The conflict behind the expulsion was complex and stemmed in part from Anthony's efforts to train female workers to take the jobs of striking New York printers, who at the time excluded women from apprenticeships in their trade. But many workingmen opposed Anthony because her vision of total female equality—including women's right to vote and equal access to jobs and pay—threatened male domination. In arguing for

"Less Than Twenty-Five Cents a Day": Unskilled Work for Women

In a speech delivered on April 29, 1869, at a convention of Boston working women, a Miss Phelps describes the plight of wage-earning women employed in unskilled and low-paying jobs.

There are before me now women whom I know to be working at the present time for less than twenty-five cents a day. Some of the work they do at these rates from the charitable institutions of the city. These institutions give out work to the women with the professed object of helping them, at which they can scarcely earn enough to keep them from starving; work at which two persons, with their utmost exertions, cannot earn more than forty-five cents a day. These things, I repeat, should be known to the public. They do not know how the daughters of their soldiers fare. I do. They have a little aid, to be sure, from the state, but it is only a little, and they have today to live in miserable garrets without fire; and during the cold winters with scanty food and insufficient clothing, they go out daily to labor along these beautiful streets. Do not you think that they feel the difference between their condition and that of rich, well-dressed ladies who pass them? If they did not, they would be less than human. But they work on bravely and uncomplainingly, venturing all things for the hope of the life that is to come. . . . Last winter many of them did not get work enough at even ten cents a garment to live upon, and were obliged to ask charity. They get it doled out to them, but at what a loss of self-respect, of independence! How much better to have these girls independent, earning their own living, enjoying their own homes, than that they should be compelled to go to station houses for soup! That is what many of them had to do last winter. The people have wondered how these girls live.

Can you imagine how you should live upon twenty cents a day? Rent is one or two dollars at the lowest, and there is your clothes and your food. Count it up. Where does it come from?

Herbert G. Gutman Archive, American Social History Project.

Anthony's expulsion, one NLU member noted, "The lady goes in for taking women away from the washtub, and in the name of heaven who is going there if they don't? I believe in woman doing her work and men marrying them, and supporting them."

Women's rights advocates, rebuffed by union leaders, shared the interest of Boston's sewing workers in using state power to improve the lives of women. They argued that the Reconstruction era amendments to the U.S. Constitution could be interpreted in broad and inclusive ways that would gain rights for women without limiting the rights of African Americans or of white male workers. If women gained the right to vote, advocates of

woman suffrage argued, then they could influence legislators to improve women's economic position. The legal strategy they wielded, known as the New Departure, was developed by a husband-and-wife team of Missouri suffragists, Francis and Virginia Minor, in 1869. The Minors emphasized the new idea of federal power as positive and as supportive of individual rights, broadly defined.

A Lady Delegate Reading Her Argument in Favor of Woman's Voting, on the Basis of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Constitutional Amendments

A delegation of women, including Victoria Woodhull (standing) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (seated behind her), argued for voting rights before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives in January 1871. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 4, 1871 — American Social History Project.

Hundreds of women tested the argument for universal suffrage backed up by the power of the national government. Between 1868 and 1872, freedwomen, female antislavery veterans, women taxpayers, and women wage earners attempted to register and vote in South Carolina coastal communities; in Vineland, New Jersey; Detroit, Michigan; St. Louis, Missouri; Washington, D.C.; Santa Cruz, California; and dozens of other cities and towns. These attempts to vote led to a number of arrests, the most famous being that of Susan B. Anthony in Rochester, New York, in 1872. Anthony's case came to trial in a federal district court at Canandaigua, New York, in the spring of 1873. The judgment—rendered by a judge rather than a jury—repudiated an inclusive interpretation of the Reconstruction amendments.

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were relatively new additions to the U.S. Constitution and were just starting to be tested. The judge's narrow interpretation of the Fifteenth Amendment in the Anthony case boded ill for their use to broaden political and economic opportunity in the United States. Moreover, this ruling and others like it had important implications for African Americans and for white male workers as well as for women. In 1873, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld both the right of Illinois to bar women from practicing law in the state (in *Bradwell v. Illinois*) and the right of Louisiana to regulate the work of butchers (in the three cases known as the Slaughter-House Cases). The two opinions, handed down on the same day, ensured that the federal powers granted under the Fourteenth Amendment would not be used to advance the interests of either women or workers. By 1875, the voting rights accorded under the Fifteenth Amendment would be similarly narrowed, with the U.S. Supreme Court arguing, in a case brought by Virginia Minor (*Minor v. Happersett*), that the Constitution "does not confer the right of suffrage upon any one." Shortly afterward, the Court used this logic in *United States v. Reese* and *United States v. Cruikshank* to reject the claims of two freedmen who sought protection of their political rights under the Fifteenth Amendment.

The Fifteenth Amendment Illustrated

A cartoon in an 1870 edition of *Die Vehme* ("The Star Chamber"), a short-lived St. Louis satirical weekly, supports woman suffrage by denigrating the voting rights of male African Americans, Chinese, and "illiterate" immigrants. Joseph Keppler, *Die Vehme*, April 2, 1870 — American Social History Project.

The judicial redress that women, workers, and African Americans sought in the early 1870s demonstrated that members of these groups viewed both the federal government and union organization as avenues for improving the lives of their families and communities. The rulings that the courts handed down, reinforced by Congress's retreat from the egalitarian implications of Reconstruction era laws, belied these hopes to forge broad alliances in the fight for equal rights. The failure of postwar coalitions across racial, gender, or class lines haunted efforts at collective action for decades to come.

The Panic of 1873 But working people in America faced an even more immediate challenge in the mid-1870s: five years of serious deflation and the longest and most severe depression of the century. An economic crisis of such magnitude not only dealt a heavy blow to labor activism, but also delivered a fatal blow to Reconstruction. In the South, the depression drove many black landowners and renters back into the ranks of laborers, sharply reduced wage levels for African Americans, and helped to transform sharecropping into a system of peonage. In the North, the depression encouraged northern businessmen and workers to focus their attention on problems at home and away from divisive racial politics in the South.

The crisis began on September 18, 1873, triggered by the collapse of Jay Cooke and Company, one of the country's great investment houses. In a

matter of days, panic led to runs on a number of banks across the country, and for the first time, the New York Stock Exchange closed. By 1874, construction of railroads and buildings ground to a halt, and tens of thousands of businesses, large and small, went bankrupt. Two years later, in 1876, half the nation's railroads had defaulted on their bonds, and half the nation's iron furnaces were idle. The businesses that survived did so by engaging in cutthroat competition to keep customers, causing the prices of capital and consumer goods to spiral downward.

Panic, as a Health Officer, Sweeping the Garbage out of Wall Street

Despite the ghastly appearance of the figure representing financial panic, this *New York Daily Graphic* cover cartoon of September 29, 1873, subscribed to the belief that such financial "busts" cleansed the economy. Frank Bellew, *New York Daily Graphic*, September 29, 1873 — American Social History Project.

The nation had experienced economic downturns before, but this one differed in both kind and degree. Not only was it the longest period of uninterrupted economic contraction in U.S. history—a full sixty-five months—but it also exacted an extraordinary human toll. This was because so many more Americans were now dependent on industry for wage labor for their survival. By 1874, fully a million workers were without jobs. City dwellers were hit hardest. In some cities, unemployment approached 25 percent of the workforce. New York alone counted some 100,000 unemployed workers in the winter of 1873–1874. "The sufferings of the working classes are daily increasing," wrote one Philadelphia worker the following summer. "Famine has broken into the home of many of us, and is at the door of all." Workers in small towns could—and did—tend little garden plots or engaged in hunting as a way to survive the hard times. The countryside was flooded, however, with urban men and a few women, wandering from town to town in search of jobs. The wanderers often used the network of railroads that earlier had linked the nation in a single prosperous market, which led to the birth of the popular image of the rail-riding "tramp."

The struggle for public relief now became far more pressing than that for the eight-hour day. In mass meetings, workers in cities across the nation demanded jobs. New York labor leaders in the winter of 1873 demanded to know what would be done "to relieve the necessities of the 10,000 homeless and hungry men and women of our city." They called on officials to create jobs financed by the sale of government bonds. Their request was denied,

A Tramp's Morning Ablutions

An early morning scene in New York's Madison Square during the summer of 1877. To the annoyance of more affluent urban residents, city parks all over the United States served as homes for many of the country's unemployed. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, July 21, 1877 — American Social History Project.

and the police brutally suppressed subsequent meetings of the unemployed in New York. In Chicago, St. Louis, and other large cities, many in the West, socialists took a leading role in the protests of the unemployed. It was during this period that socialism moved out of its relative isolation in German neighborhoods and began to build a larger following among native-born workers. In these cities, too, demonstrators demanding relief and jobs were often met with violence from public officials and the police and open hostility from the press.

Employers and their supporters, drawing on Social Darwinist theories, viewed the depression as a necessary, if painful, process that would weed out inefficient businesses and allow only the strongest and most creative capitalists (and, by extension, workers) to survive. Business and government leaders were inclined to blame the suffering of working people on "the ignorance, indolence, and immorality" of the poor, and they attacked public works schemes as a form of imported "communism." Business leaders and editors spoke scornfully of the "debased bread of charity." The *Nation* magazine summed up this attitude when its editor, E. L. Godkin, wrote in its Christmas 1875 issue that "free soup must be prohibited, and all classes must learn that soup of any kind, beef or turtle, can be had only by being paid for."

The depression nearly destroyed the young labor movement. At the depression's beginning in 1873, there were almost thirty national trade unions, with 300,000 members. By the end of the decade, the numbers had dropped to eight or nine unions, with only about 50,000 members. Any wage gains that had been won since the Civil War were lost. New York building tradesmen, for example, had earned $2.50 to $3.00 for an eight-hour day in 1872; three years later, they were working a ten-hour day for $1.50 to $2.00.

Northern white working-class voters, preoccupied by the depression and still unconvinced by arguments for racial equality, turned away from their own earlier radicalism and that of Reconstruction. Capitalizing on this weariness, Democrats scored important victories in the North in the

elections of 1874 and subsequently took control of the House of Representatives.

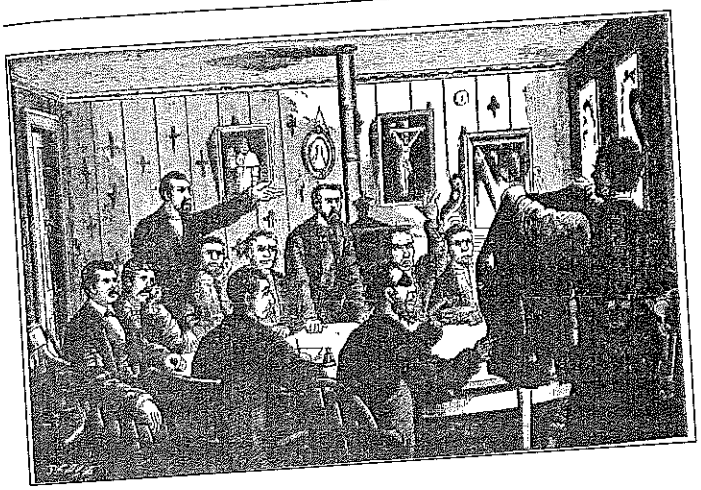
For African Americans in the South, the depression coincided with the end of Reconstruction. The political leverage of black workers collapsed, and they had no alternative now but to accept white rule and white control of the economy. One of the most significant effects of the depression in the South was, ironically, the consolidation of a capitalist economy in that region. After 1873, merchants who were unwilling to accept the financial risks of extending credit to poor farmers and farm laborers, black or white, instead charged goods to the accounts of large planters. The planters then resold the goods to workers, usually at inflated prices. Lien laws ensured that any debts that were owed to planters and merchants would be paid before small farmers could take profits for themselves. This meant that in a season of bad harvests or low prices, both of which were frequent in the 1870s, black farm families that had slowly and painfully accumulated a little capital, or even a piece of land, were likely to lose everything.

The Red Flag in New York — Riotous Communist Workingmen Driven from Tompkins Square by the Mounted Police, Tuesday, January 13th 1874

Demonstrations by workers and their allies demanding relief and job programs often were met with official violence and were treated with hostility by the nation's press. Matthew Somerville Morgan, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 31, 1874 — American Social History Project.

At the same time, southern manufacturers increased their holdings as falling cotton prices and a growing supply of unskilled wage labor created the possibilities for industrial profits. The Bibb Manufacturing Company in Macon, Georgia, for instance, opened a massive cotton mill in the midst of the depression. Between 1870 and 1880, the number of Macon's African American household heads who worked as artisans or professionals fell precipitously. Among their white neighbors, many men left the skilled trades as well. Some moved into clerical, professional, or proprietary positions. Others joined white women and children in the cotton mills, which flourished despite the economic crisis.

The dual transformation of black landowners, renters, and sharecroppers into day laborers and of poor whites into industrial wage earners created a southern workforce that mirrored, more closely than ever before, that of the North and West. This same transformation ensured that even in the midst of hard times, activism among some southern workers — white and black; rural and urban — would continue. The Readjuster movement in Virginia in the late 1870s and early 1880s typified such interracial cooperation, bringing together black and white small farmers and urban workers in a political coalition to change the state's economic policies. Such activism was largely local and short-lived, but its very persistence suggested the potential for a new labor and political insurgency that could respond to the needs of working people throughout the country. Particularly as industrial develop-



The Molly Maguires
An illustration from *The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives*, Allan Pinkerton's self-serving account of his detective agency's infiltration of the secret society of Irish miners, shows a clandestine meeting in a bar adorned with pictures of the pope and numerous crucifixes (indicating the miners' allegiance to a foreign power). Pinkerton's work in the service of the Reading Railroad typified the widespread use of private police by railroads and other businesses to suppress unions.
Allan Pinkerton, *The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives* (1877) — American Social History Project.

ment moved south and growing numbers of southern workers moved north and west, the preconditions were developed for the creation of a national working class and a national labor movement.

Workers Renew Demands for Economic and Political Power Though insurgencies that crossed lines of region or race were still rare, railroad workers launched a wave of strikes across the nation between November 1873 and July 1874. Engineers, brakemen, and machinists on eighteen railroads walked off their jobs, mainly in response to wage cuts. The workers effectively disrupted railroad traffic through a variety of actions: removing coupling pins from freight cars, tearing up sections of track, and cutting telegraph lines. Railroad companies in turn convinced a number of state governors to send in the militia, and nearly all of the strikes were eventually defeated. Despite those defeats, the strikes indicated the determination of rank-and-file workers to resist attacks on their livelihood.

More characteristic in the mid-1870s were regional labor protests, such as the dramatic Long Strike in the eastern Pennsylvania coalfields. Franklin Gowen, president of the Reading Railroad, had bought up small mines in the area and by 1874 had become the largest coal operator in eastern Pennsylvania. In a plan to break labor's power, he stockpiled coal and then, in the winter of 1874–1875, shut down his mines. The bitter struggle that followed lasted five months, caused tremendous hardships for the miners and their

"A 'Tramp and Vagabond'": Looking for Work in 1875

In a September 7, 1875, letter to the National Labor Tribune, *an unemployed mechanic describes his year-long search for work and the rejection he faced.*

Twelve months ago, left penniless by misfortune, I started from New York in search of employment. . . . During this year I have traversed seventeen states and obtained in that time six weeks' work. I have faced starvation; been months at a time without a bed, when the thermometer was 30 degrees below zero. Last winter I slept in the woods, and while honestly seeking employment I have been two and three days without food. When, in God's name, I asked for something to keep body and soul together, I have been repulsed as a "tramp and vagabond."

National Labor Tribune, September 7, 1875.

families, and was marked by violence on both sides. "Coal and Iron Police" hired by Gowen shot indiscriminately into crowds of workers, while members of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association (WBA), the union that represented the miners, attacked strikebreakers with clubs and stones.

Gowen also hired the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to infiltrate the miners' organization, providing further ammunition against the workers. Allan Pinkerton had formed a detective agency and private security company in Cook County, Illinois, in the 1850s after consulting with several midwestern railroad companies. Initially, his agents provided security for private businesses, since city police forces were generally small and underfunded. They also hired out their services to army contractors and tracked western outlaws such as Jesse James and his gang. In 1860, Pinkerton had gained national fame when he foiled a plot to assassinate President-elect Abraham Lincoln. By the 1870s, railroads and other corporations regularly hired Pinkerton agents to infiltrate labor unions and guard company property against strikers, such as the Pennsylvania miners. Despite their courage and determination, the miners of the WBA could not overcome the combined power of the Reading Railroad Company and the Pinkertons. They finally had to concede defeat and reluctantly accept a 20 percent wage cut.

Greenback Candidate
The early craftworker career of the Greenback Party's 1876 presidential candidate, the businessman and philanthropist Peter Cooper, is featured on a campaign poster. Courtesy of The Cooper Union.

In the winter of 1876, Pennsylvania coal miners were again confronted by the anger of mine owners, now cloaked in the robes of law. James McParlan, a Pinkerton Agency operative who had lived among the Irish miners of eastern Pennsylvania for several years, stepped forward and became a leading witness in a series of sensational murder trials. McParlan testified that the murders of a mine boss and a miner were the result of a conspiracy by the Molly Maguires, a shadowy organization of Irish immigrant workers who were reputed to be willing to redress their grievances through violence. He also claimed that the "Mollies" dominated the WBA.

Despite questions about the validity of the testimony of McParlan and other Pinkerton agents, more than twenty miners were found guilty of murder and related charges in the spring of 1876. A year later, ten were hanged and over the course of 1878 and 1879 ten more would be executed. Because of widespread press coverage, these trials helped to link in the public mind trade unionism and terrorism. The perception destroyed unionism in eastern Pennsylvania mining for twenty years.

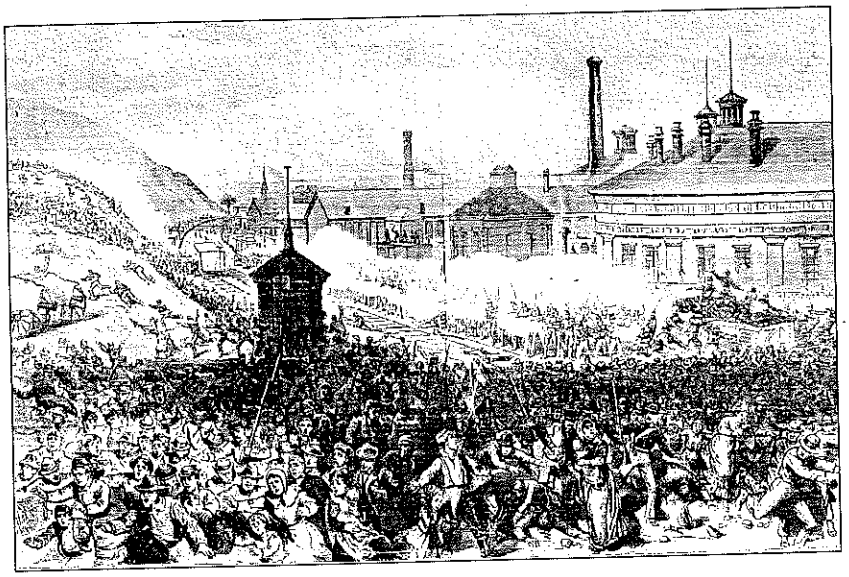
The lack of responsiveness to workers' needs on the part of the two existing political parties also increased working-class dissatisfaction with traditional politics during the depression years. With the growing disfranchisement of African Americans in the South and the disaffection of northern workingmen, the Republican Party increasingly emphasized business development and looked to businessmen as its most important social base. Politicians of both parties were accepting bribes from big business to guarantee the politicians' support on critical issues. Consequently, the two major parties, which had been diametrically opposed a mere decade earlier, now seemed indistinguishable.

As working-class activists grew increasingly dissatisfied with both parties, they looked for other, more independent roads to political influence. What they found was the Greenback Party, organized on a national level by farmers in 1875. The new party stood for governmental action to expand the currency with paper "greenbacks" that were not tied to the nation's gold reserves—a reform that was intended to inflate prices, thus benefiting debtors and providing capital needed for economic growth. Despite the protests of eight-hour advocates such as Ira Steward, many labor leaders—including Richard Trevellick, A. C. Cameron, and John Siney—rallied to the Greenback cause, marking their final rejection of the Republican Party.

Other workers, mainly from the cities and including a large core of immigrants, based their hopes on the Workingmen's Party of the United States. The Socialists who founded this party in 1876 put aside their differences and took a major step toward bringing immigrant and native-born workers together in the same political organization.

The Prohibition Party, inspired by grassroots campaigns against saloons in Ohio in 1874 and 1875, also began nominating candidates for state and national elections. Neither the Greenback nor the Workingmen's Party offered any real threat to Republican dominance, however. The Prohibitionists were limited by women's lack of voting rights, since it was women who had led the attacks on "rum sellers" across the Midwest. Nonetheless, the willingness of workers to experiment with alternative party affiliations suggested a new awareness of their place in national politics.

The Great Uprising of 1877 The very events that crushed the aspirations of many black and working-class Americans—the "redemption" of



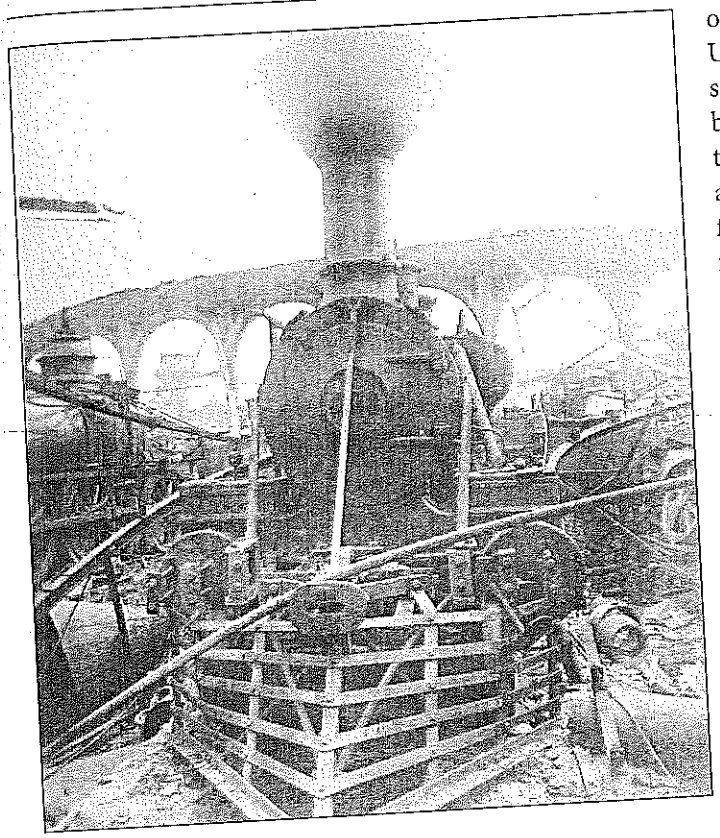
The Philadelphia Militia Firing on the Mob, at the Twenty-eighth Street Crossing, near the Union Depot of the Pennsylvania Railroad, on Saturday Afternoon, July 21st

A panoramic engraving based on an eyewitness sketch delineates the composition of the crowd that gathered to observe and protest the arrival of the Philadelphia militia. John Donaghy, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 4, 1877 — American Social History Project.

southern state governments, the opening of new investment opportunities in the former Confederacy, the tainted victory of the Republican Party in the 1876 presidential election, and the defeat of labor radicalism by the trials of the Molly Maguires—buoyed the hopes of businessmen. Although the country had not yet emerged from the depression, the major problem of cutthroat competition was gradually being eliminated by the emergence of large monopolies in a number of basic industries. And unionism was clearly in retreat. The public hanging of ten Molly Maguires in June 1877 seemed to close the book on a defeated post–Civil War labor movement.

Within a month of the hangings, however, it would be clear that business confidence was profoundly misplaced. In July 1877, a massive railroad strike, the first truly national strike in the country's history, shook the very foundations of the political and economic order. On July 16, 1877, in Martinsburg, West Virginia, workers on the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) railroad staged a spontaneous strike in response to yet another wage cut imposed by the railroad company. Three days later, as the strike intensified, President Hayes ordered federal troops into West Virginia to protect the B&O and the nation from "insurrection."

The use of federal troops in a domestic labor dispute incited popular anger across the country. In Baltimore, the Maryland state militia fired on huge crowds of angry workers, leaving eleven dead and forty wounded. Work stoppages rapidly spread north and west along the railroad lines to Pennsylvania, where, in Pittsburgh, the strike reached its most dramatic climax. Because many Pittsburgh citizens sympathized with the railroad workers, the Pennsylvania Railroad sought help from outside the city. But when the state militia reached Pittsburgh on July 21, a large and angry crowd



July 22, 1877
The interior of the Pennsylvania Railroad's upper roundhouse after the battle between the Philadelphia militia and Pittsburgh strikers. This picture was part of a series of forty-four stereographs by S. V. Albee that were sold commercially as "The Railroad War." Stereographs were cards with "double photographs" that, when viewed through a "stereoscope," looked three-dimensional. By the 1870s, stereoscope viewing was one of the most popular forms of home entertainment. S. V. Albee, "The Railroad War" — Paul Dickson Collection.

of strikers and sympathizers met them. Unnerved by their reception, the soldiers suddenly thrust their bayonets at members of the crowd. When rocks were thrown at the troops, they answered with a volley of rifle fire. When the gunfire finally ended, twenty Pittsburgh citizens, including a woman and three small children, lay dead.

News of the killings quickly spread. Pittsburgh residents, including thousands of workers from nearby mills, mines, and factories, converged on the Pennsylvania Railroad yards. By dawn, they had set fire to the railroad roundhouse to which the militiamen had retreated. Twenty more Pittsburgh residents and five soldiers were killed in the ensuing gun battle.

In the next few days, the strike spread across the Midwest. Workers took over entire towns, shutting down work until employers met their demands. The same railroad and telegraph lines that had unified the nation and laid the groundwork for the full emergence of industrial capitalism also linked and unified workers' protests. Without any central organization (most national unions were defunct as a result of the 1870s depression), the conflict spawned local committees, many led by anarchists and socialists, that provided unity and direction to the strike. In Chicago, for example, the strike quickly became a citywide general strike that touched off open class warfare. In St. Louis, by contrast, thousands of workers participated in a largely peaceful general strike that shut down virtually all of the city's industries, while government officials fled. Black workers in St. Louis took an active role in the strike, closing down canneries and docks. When an African American steamboat worker, addressing a crowd of white workers, asked, "Will you stand to us regardless of color?" the crowd responded, "We will! We will! We will!" In other strikes, however, racism prevailed, particularly in the Far West. In San Francisco, a crowd gathered to discuss strike action but ended up rampaging through the city's Chinese neighborhoods, killing several residents and burning buildings.

But the massive national strike was directed mainly against the railroads and the unchecked corporate power they typified. Most working people in 1877 were seeking not to overthrow capitalism as a whole, but to

"The Grand Army of Starvation": The 1877 Strike

At a rally called on July 23, Albert Parsons, a printer and a leader of the Workingmen's Party, addressed 10,000 striking Chicago workers and their supporters. Parsons's speech evoked widely held republican ideals; his opening image of a "grand army of starvation" recalls the Grand Army of the Republic, a name that had been used for the victorious Union Army in the Civil War.

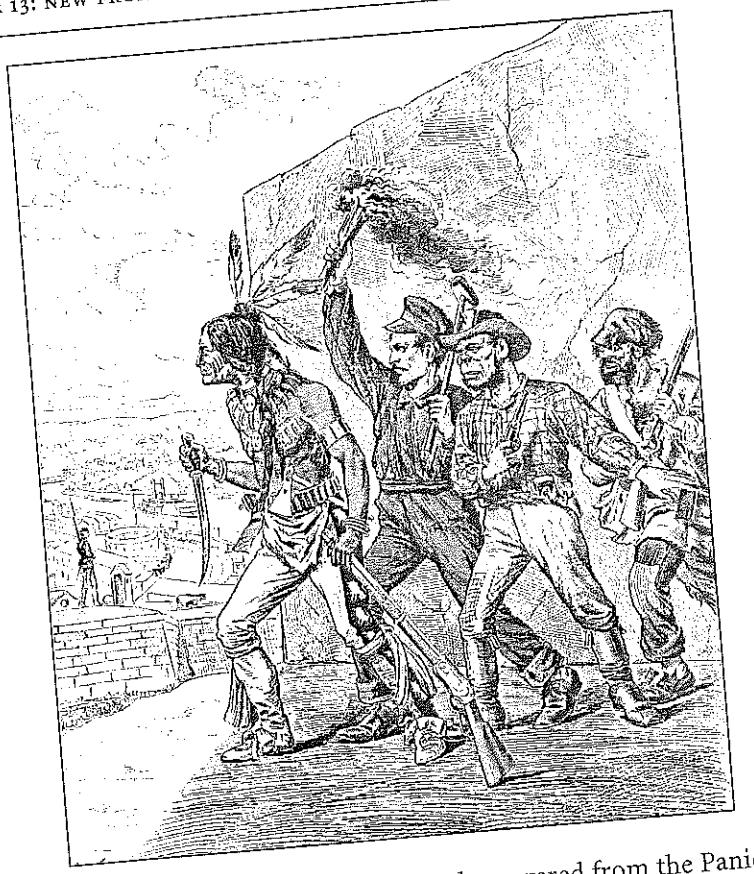
We are assembled as the grand army of starvation. Fellow workers, let us recollect that in this great Republic that has been handed down to us by our forefathers from 1776, that while we have the Republic we still have hope. A mighty spirit is animating the hearts of the American people today. When I say the American people I mean the backbone of the country—the men who till the soil, guide the machine, who weave the material and cover the backs of civilized men. . . . [We] have demanded of those in possession of the means of production . . . that they not be allowed to turn us upon the earth as vagrants and tramps. . . . We have come together this evening, if it is possible, to find the means by which the great gloom that now hangs over our Republic can be lifted and once more the rays of happiness can be shed on the face of this broad land.

Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, July 25, 1877.

set limits on the system's unbridled economic power and to assert workers' right to an equitable share of the extraordinary economic bounty they helped to produce. Despite the nationwide mobilization of workers in the first truly national strike in American history, in the end, the strike failed when faced with the massive power of the railroads and their allies in state and national government.

Conclusion: The Lessons of 1877

To fully engage in successful collective action, workers would have to create a labor movement in the future that would welcome a national and increasingly diverse labor force. Native-born and immigrant workers, men and women, African Americans, Asians, Indians, Mexican Americans, and whites, skilled and unskilled, industrial, agricultural, and domestic workers would have to find common cause in the same way that planters and industrialists, railroad magnates and coal operators, moderate Republicans and New South Democrats had. And they would have to do so in a nation that now embraced lands from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast and beyond; that was increasingly defined by industrial and urban developments; and that was venturing ever further into international arenas of commerce, labor, and war. Moreover, workers would have to deal with a national—and international—economy that was marked by periodic panics and depressions.



Waiting for the Reduction of the Army
As this 1878 cartoon from the *New York Daily Graphic* indicated, in the aftermath of the "Great Uprising" of 1877, Indians, trade unionists, immigrants, and tramps were often grouped together in the press as symbols of disorder and opposition to the nation's progress. Ph. G. Cusachs, *New York Daily Graphic*, June 14, 1878 — American Social History Project.

By 1877, the United States had recovered from the Panic of 1873 and returned to prosperity. Still, as the 1877 strike made clear, even prosperity did not promise opportunity or equality for all Americans. Those were goals that generations of workers, from diverse backgrounds, would continue to seek.

The Years in Review

1859

- The National Molders' Union is founded as part of nationwide growth of trade unions.

1862

- Congress passes the Homestead Act, which allows any adult citizen or permanent immigrant to claim 160 acres of public land for a $10 fee; final title to the land is granted after five years of residence.
- Congress also passes the Morrill Act, which gives land grants to states to build state universities, using profits from the sale of public lands to the railroads.