Background Essay: Workers in the Gilded Age

In the late nineteenth century, millions of Americans found employment in industrial jobs and discovered that the industrial revolution had fundamentally altered the nature of work. Industrial employees now worked according to the constraints of industrial time rather than setting their own hours as artisans. Workers did not produce an object from start to finish, but rather contributed labor to a segmented part of mass production. They worked long, grueling hours in dangerous factories, mines, or railroads that led to thousands of accidental injuries and deaths annually. Factory management, focused on the goal of increasing profit, demanded constant maximum efficiency and effort from each worker, which they were not accustomed to on the farm or in artisan shops. Later, this was formalized by the introduction of Taylorism, or time-motion studies in which workers were required to perform certain tasks within a standard period of time.

In the nineteenth century, workers began to form labor unions, which were worker organizations created to bargain collectively with the management of companies rather than leave each worker to bargain on his own behalf. When workers joined unions, they surrendered their individual freedom of contract to negotiate with management, but gained power in numbers. Some workers were forced to join a union when it created a “closed shop” (all the workers had to join the union to be employed) though some workplaces were still an “open shop” (workers had a choice whether to join). Unions had different characters and took varied approaches to bargaining with employers. All unions, however, acted on behalf of their members to attempt to negotiate better pay, hours, and working conditions. If the employer and the union could not agree to the terms of a labor contract, the union might call a strike, or a work stoppage, to add pressure on the employer to cede to union demands.

The experience of individual workers often varied widely and depended upon how skilled they were. Millions of southeastern Europeans and migrants from rural America who settled in cities and worked in industry were unskilled or semi-skilled workers, often hindered by unfamiliarity with American language and urban culture. They were easily replaceable by other workers seeking employment and therefore they received lower wages. They suffered periods of unemployment, especially during economic downturns, and did not have bargaining power to join labor unions in order to demand better pay or conditions. Women often went to work in factories or took on piecemeal work at home to supplement family incomes, struggling to rise above the poverty line. Nevertheless, real wages earned by unskilled workers rose 44 percent from the Civil War to World War I with most of the increase coming after the Depression of 1893. While wages rose substantially during a period of deflation, average incomes were between $550 and $600 a year, which was barely above the subsistence line.
On the other hand, skilled workers had indispensable abilities that their employers desperately needed and could not easily replace. Skilled workers received higher pay and enjoyed better working conditions. They could negotiate directly with their employer for better pay and had the leverage to join labor unions.

Middle-class professions proliferated as white-collar clerical workers and professionals provided services and skills. Millions of workers became teachers, accountants, and managers. Women entered the workforce in growing numbers, especially if they were single, and usually became teachers, nurses, and secretaries. Professionals earned more than clerks, but many of these salaried employees earned more than $1,000 annually and had much better working conditions than those in a factory or mine.

The tensions between the industrial workforce and management throughout the Gilded Age were exacerbated by severe economic downturns that occurred with some frequency in 1873, 1884, and 1893, and lasted for several years. Workers went on strikes that were characterized by violence, property destruction, and eventual suppression by state and federal troops. Companies had a legitimate interest in keeping labor costs down during economic depressions, while workers reasonably expected to be paid a more livable wage under better conditions. These conflicting interests often led to confrontation and violence in major industries. Workers had constitutional rights to free assembly and free speech, while employers had the constitutional right to property protection. Both had freedom of contract.

The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

In 1877, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad introduced a second wage cut of ten percent due to a lingering recession, causing workers to go on strike in Martinsburg, West Virginia, as well as in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere. Strikers burned, looted, and destroyed railroad property. The West Virginia governor sent in militia, but it sympathized with the strikers. President Rutherford B. Hayes then sent in federal troops to break up the strikes. Violence erupted in different cities as strikers threw rocks at police and federal troops, who responded by firing into crowds – even with machine guns.

Haymarket Riot

On May 1, 1886, hundreds of thousands of workers joined a general strike throughout the United States aimed at securing an eight-hour work day, at a time when the typical industrial workday was ten hours, six days a week. During a rally in Chicago on May 3, police beat strikers from the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company and then fired into a crowd killing several workers. A peaceful mass protest against police brutality was called for the following day at Haymarket Square. After the rally when police tried to disperse the crowd, someone threw a bomb into a group of police officers, killing eight and wounding dozens. The officers then fired into the crowd and inflicted an equal number of casualties.

Homestead Strike

Whereas Andrew Carnegie generally favored the rights of his workers to join unions and felt a responsibility to treat them well, his manager at the Homestead steel mill near Pittsburgh, Henry Clay Frick, adopted a more hardline view when Carnegie was out of the country in 1892. Instead of negotiating with the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, Frick cut wages and then locked workers out of the
factories. His plan was to fire the strikers and replace them with more submissive workers. Frick hired guards from the Pinkerton Detective Agency to protect strikebreakers (called “scabs” by strikers) and quash the strike. The two sides exchanged fire in a shootout resembling a battle. In all, nine steel company workers, as well as seven Pinkertons, were killed, and many more were hurt. Sympathies in the town favored the workers, and tensions rose to a fever pitch when the governor sent in thousands of militia to restore order. Alexander Berkman, a Russian anarchist, tried to strike a blow for workers everywhere in a failed attempt to assassinate Frick. Frick cabled both his mother and Carnegie that he had been shot twice, “but not dangerously.” Meanwhile, union officials were arrested and indicted in a tense standoff between strikers and management, and the strike collapsed after five months.

Pullman Strike

In 1894, a recession led railroad companies to cut wages, and Pullman Company workers in Chicago went on strike with the support of the American Railway Union led by Eugene V. Debs. The strike shut down railroad traffic across the country early that summer. Attorney General Richard Olney filed an injunction against the strikers, and President Grover Cleveland dispatched federal troops who clashed violently with strikers. Predictably, this resulted in property damage and deaths. A unanimous Supreme Court decision, *In re Debs* (1895), upheld the conviction of Debs for ignoring the injunction and interfering with interstate commerce.

As a result of the Pullman Strike, the labor injunction became a popular tool to quell strikes under the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890) because it held that unions were a monopoly that restrained trade. Companies also had other weapons that they deployed to damage labor unions. The yellow-dog contract forced employees not to join a labor union and supported an open-shop where workers were not compelled to join a labor union as in a closed-shop. Companies also blacklisted employees who struggled to organize workers into unions. In *Adair v. U.S.* (1895), the Supreme Court endorsed the constitutional principle of “liberty of contract,” which meant that employers could fire a worker for any reason, and workers were equally free to decide to leave employment.

Labor Unions

During the late nineteenth century, workers joined labor unions because they empowered workers to bargain collectively rather than as individuals. The different unions had varied approaches to organizing workers and reflected diverse philosophies with differing levels of success. Uriah Stephens founded the Knights of Labor in 1868 with a vision of establishing a “cooperative commonwealth” in which the capitalist wage system would be abolished and replaced with a system where all workers would share in the ownership of factories and in the profits. It also supported the eight-hour day and a variety of general social reforms. The Knights welcomed the skilled and unskilled, men and women, white and black into its membership. While the membership promoted equality, it had an inherently fatal flaw. The Knights eventually declined because its unskilled members were fired and could not pay dues during recessions, causing membership to collapse. Moreover, the union was internally divided between the different races and classes, companies fought
back against the Knights, and several of its strikes failed.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), led by William Haywood, was another union ill-suited to organize the American labor force. Although it scored some successes organizing mine and lumber workers in the West, it was founded on a communist philosophy that sought the violent overthrow of capitalism. Many Americans considered the IWW too radical, and it declined due to a series of failed strikes and the Red Scare that followed World War I.

One union known as the American Federation of Labor (AFL), established by Samuel Gompers in 1886, adopted a balanced approach that favored long-term success for the union. Gompers organized skilled workers according to a philosophy of “business unionism,” or a focus on higher pay and lower hours rather than visionary social reform. In fact, the AFL usually opposed government reform because workers would depend on government rather than on the unions for their interests. The AFL weathered the Depression of 1893 and had approximately 450,000 members on its growing rolls.

In the early twentieth century, state governments passed laws regulating labor conditions such as limiting the number of hours employees could work, and the labor of women and children. These laws reflected the influence of a group of reformers known as progressives. The basic belief that united them was that the industrialized, urbanized United States of the nineteenth century had outgrown its eighteenth-century Constitution. Progressives advocated a more active role for the government in regulating the economy, maintaining that the Constitution did not give government, especially the federal government, enough power to deal with unprecedented problems. The progressives targeted big business, whose economic power they believed allowed it to dominate politics, enabling it to gain special privileges (such as franchises, monopolies, tariffs) and to avoid regulation for the public good (such as health and safety regulations). They held that it was necessary to regulate the national economy to counter the influence of big business. Progressives in numerous states turned to social science instead of the Constitution for minimum-wage laws and maximum-hours laws. Organized labor usually supported these laws as ways to eliminate competition from female, immigrant, and black workers in the belief that these groups drove down wages.

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court issued several decisions related to a number of state and federal laws. In *Lochner v. New York* (1905), the Court overturned a New York law limiting the number of hours bakers could work. The majority opinion asserted that the right to liberty of contract invalidated the state law. Progressives criticized the decision as an example of a Social Darwinist Court defending a laissez-faire system based on “survival of the fittest.” However, others saw it as an example of support for eighteenth-century classical liberal principles such as limited government, constitutionalism, rule of law, due process, free markets, and individual liberties.

The Supreme Court upheld many of the new regulatory labor laws in several other cases. In *Muller v. Oregon* (1908), the majority upheld limits on women’s working hours because of the belief that “woman’s physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence.” The paternalistic decision was influenced by copious social science contained
in the “Brandeis Brief” submitted by Progressive and future justice, Louis Brandeis. In *Bunting v. Oregon* (1917), the Court upheld a law that limited all factory workers to ten hours a day.

**Federal Government Action**

The federal government began to intervene on the side of organized labor during the Progressive Era in the early 1900s. President Theodore Roosevelt adopted a progressive view of executive power in which the president acted as the “steward of the people” in order to exercise whatever powers he believed necessary unless explicitly forbidden by the Constitution. With dubious constitutional authority, Roosevelt intervened in the 1902 anthracite coal strike when mine owners refused to submit to demands of the United Mine Workers. Roosevelt engineered talks between labor leaders and mine owners. However, after these talks failed to settle the strike, he believed the skyrocketing coal prices endangered the national interest. Therefore, Roosevelt threatened to use federal troops to seize and operate the mines. Shortly thereafter, both sides submitted to arbitration by a federal commission.

Organized labor continued to grow and influence national policy during the Progressive Era and World War I. President William Howard Taft signed a bill creating the Department of Labor in 1913. The Wilson Administration won the passage of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act (1914), which exempted labor unions from anti-trust prosecution. Congress also passed the wartime Adamson Act that mandated an eight-hour workday for railroad workers. The 1916 Keating-Owen Child Labor Act banned the shipment across state lines of goods made in factories which employed children under the age of fourteen, but the Supreme Court ruled this law unconstitutional in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* (1918). The Court’s majority held that Congress had overstepped its constitutional power in attempting to regulate the production of goods. During the war, AFL President Gompers traded a no-strike pledge for the right to organize and bargain collectively. The Wilson administration created a National War Labor Board to protect the rights of workers and unions during the war. As a result, union membership grew 70 percent to an estimated 4 million workers, about 15% of the non-agricultural workforce.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dramatic changes in the economy significantly altered working conditions with the rise of the factory system. American workers joined labor unions, which became highly influential organizations in the American economy and politics throughout the twentieth century. As real wages and living standards continued to grow after the war, workers participated in the consumer culture and began to identify increasingly with the goods they purchased. After a series of post-war strikes, union radicalism soon gave way to “welfare capitalism” whereby employers gave workers higher pay and other benefits to quell the appeal of labor unions. Lasting federal protections would occur later during the New Deal.
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the goals of labor unions and how might they differ from the goals of owners/managers of businesses? What process do you think would be the best way to meet the needs of both groups?

2. In the nineteenth century, what did workers give up by joining labor unions? What did they gain?

3. How was the situation of skilled workers different from that of unskilled workers?

4. How did the job outlook change for middle class and white-collar workers in the late nineteenth century?

5. What were the main labor unions in America during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, and how did they differ from one another? Which one(s) seemed to be most/least successful and why?

6. Review the Supreme Court decisions described in the essay. Which decisions show the greatest influence of Progressives?

7. In what ways was the outlook and agenda of Progressives in tension with the Founders’ approach to the proper role of government?

8. What government actions show the influence of progressivism and support for the labor movement following 1900?

9. What is welfare capitalism, and how did it change the expectations that workers held with respect to their jobs?
PARTS

1. Striking workers (multiple)
2. Strikebreakers (multiple)
3. Police (at least 2 or 3; one dies, and then 6 more die later)
4. Others
5. Speakers
6. Someone
7. Anarchists (8: Four are hanged and one commits suicide)
8. Judge Joseph Gary
9. Governor John Peter Altgeld
10. Narrator

NARRATOR: Scene One: McCormick Harvesting Machine Company Works, Chicago, May 3, 1886

Striking workers (Strikers), many of whom are German immigrants, stage a protest rally demanding improved working conditions. Specifically, they demand an 8-hour work day rather than the 10-12 hour work days currently required of them at McCormick Harvesting Machine Company Works. Strikebreakers, eager to find work during the economic downturn that had already dragged on for several years, are happy to take the jobs that the strikers complain about. Police intimidate the strikers and struggle to keep peace between the two groups. Finally, police insist that the crowd disperse. The disorder continues and police beat some of the demonstrators. Then, the police fire into the crowd to force them to leave the area. One striker is killed and others are injured in the melee.

NARRATOR: Scene Two: Haymarket Square, Chicago, May 4, 1886

Strikers and Others gather at Haymarket Square, an open area used for public markets, in order to protest against police violence. The crowd hears several Speakers who explain their ideas about social and economic reform to protect the rights of workers. Some speakers advocate radical ideas such as socialism and anarchism. The rally is peaceful throughout the day. At the end of the rally, Someone throws a bomb into a group of Policemen, killing one. Other police fire their weapons randomly into the darkness. In the resulting riot, at least four civilians and six more officers are killed. Soon the square is empty except for the casualties. At least some of the officers killed and injured were shot by one another’s service revolvers. In the investigation
that followed, there was great sympathy and support for the police. Fueled by a sensationalist press, opinion turned against immigrants, radicals, and the labor movement in general. The investigation following the riot resulted in the arrest of eight Anarchists, most of whom were German immigrants.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Three: Courtroom of Judge Joseph Gary, June through August, 1886

The trial of the Anarchists included the presentation of some evidence attempting to link shrapnel from the scene to homemade bombs found in the home of one of the defendants. However, Judge Joseph Gary conducted the trial with little concern for due process for the defendants. It was never established who built the bomb, or who threw the bomb. Only two of the defendants were even present in Haymarket Square on the evening of the riot. Most prospective jurors stated before the trial that they had already formed the opinion that the defendants were guilty. In spite of many inconsistencies in the prosecution’s evidence, the judge ruled against the defense attorneys again and again. After only three hours, the jury found seven of the defendants guilty of murder, and recommended that they be executed. The eighth defendant was sentenced to serve fifteen years in prison. Judge Gary’s reasoning was that, whether they were present in Haymarket Square or not, the anarchists were guilty of murder because they had incited the bomb-throwing through their radical speech and writing. In their appeals in state courts and in the U.S. Supreme Court, they claimed that they had been denied due process under the Fourth and Sixth Amendments, but they lost at both levels. In November, 1887, one of the defendants committed suicide and four others were executed by hanging.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Four: Illinois Governor Altgeld’s Office, 1893

Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld (a German immigrant himself) pardoned the remaining three defendants, citing the hysteria surrounding the trial, the biased judge, and the lack of physical evidence against the men. Altgeld faced political fallout for the pardons as many newspapers across the U.S. accused him of supporting anarchism.

In the meantime, the Knights of Labor had faded into insignificance for several reasons:

1. The Knights’ philosophy that all workers should be included in one massive “brotherhood of labor” resulted in their welcoming all kinds of workers, including many who were immigrants and had unpopular ideas that fed the xenophobia and prejudices of the day.
2. The Knights of Labor were blamed for furthering a climate of violence that encouraged the Haymarket tragedy, though they were never directly involved with the strike at McCormick.

3. The Knights represented so many different interests and philosophies that they could not agree on goals, leading to problems of leadership.

4. Many Americans lost sympathy for the needs of labor unions. Due to the press reports on the incidents, readers tended to associate union activities with dangerous ideas.

5. Other strikes led by the Knights of Labor failed.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the constitutional principles that are relevant in the events surrounding the Haymarket Riot.

2. What social and/or economic problems are evident leading up to the Haymarket Riot?

3. What methods to bring about social change are attempted in the events surrounding the Haymarket Riot? Evaluate the chances for success of each of the methods you identify.

4. To what extent are First Amendment or other constitutional protections evident in the Haymarket Riot, its causes and its consequences?
HANDOUT C
Homestead Strike Scene Card, 1892

PARTS
1. 3750 Striking workers
   a. 750 members of Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers Union (multiple)
   b. 3000 non-union workers (multiple)
2. Andrew Carnegie
3. Henry Clay Frick
4. Strikebreakers (multiple)
5. 11 Sheriffs deputies
6. Several thousand Homestead townspeople (multiple)
7. 300 Pinkerton agents (multiple)
8. Pennsylvania Governor Robert E. Pattison
9. 8500 National Guardsmen (multiple)
10. Alexander Berkman
11. Narrator

NARRATOR: Scene One: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania

In 1882 and 1889, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AA) had won favorable labor contracts after strikes against Carnegie companies, becoming the strongest labor union in America. Andrew Carnegie and the manager of his Homestead, Pennsylvania plant, Henry Clay Frick, agree that they should break the power of the labor union. As the 1889 three-year contract nears its expiration date in 1892, Carnegie and Frick decide to take a strong stand against the union at Homestead. Carnegie leaves for an extended vacation in Scotland, making it clear that he supports any actions Frick decides to take. The union asks for a raise; Frick responds by cutting wages for All workers (union and non-union) without reducing the workers’ rent or any other costs in the company town. He refuses to recognize the right of the union to negotiate for the workers, essentially telling employees, “Take it or leave it.” He advertises for Strikebreakers, and builds a 10-foot high fence around the entire plant. The union refuses the new contract.

NARRATOR: Scene Two: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 2, 1892

Frick completely closes down the plant and lays off All workers, announcing that he will reopen the plant with Strikebreakers. The AA holds an emergency meeting to develop their strategy against management. Even though only 750 of the plant’s workers are members of the AA union, 3000 other workers agree to support them,
and all vote to strike. Striking workers march and picket to prevent 11 Sheriff's deputies from entering the town. Frick hires 300 armed Pinkerton agents to protect the strikebreakers, guard the plant, and defeat the union.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Three: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 5, 1892

An informant in a neighboring town reports to labor leaders that barges carrying the Pinkerton agents are making their way down the Monongahela River and should arrive under cover of darkness. Thousands of Striking workers and Townspeople meet the Pinkertons upon their arrival at about midnight. Strikers warn the Pinkertons not to step off their barges, but they disregard the warning. In the early hours of July 6, someone starts shooting. The battle continues until late that afternoon when the Homestead workers force the severely outnumbered Pinkertons back to their boats. Casualties of the battle include numerous dead and wounded on both sides. Sources differ regarding which side shot first and how many were killed. Frick asks Pennsylvania’s governor to send in the National Guard to protect lives and property and to restore order.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Four: Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 12, 1892

Governor Robert E. Pattison sends 8500 National Guardsmen to keep the peace and crush the strike, but strikers hold control of the town for four more months, refusing to go back to work. By August the company has imported enough non-union Strikebreakers to restart the factory, though the lack of skilled workers continues to be a problem. Frick begins to lure skilled workers from other factories with false promises of increased pay and better working conditions. Across the country, the plight of the striking Homestead workers prompts many people to be sympathetic to their cause.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Five: Frick’s office, Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 23, 1892

A Russian immigrant and anarchist, Alexander Berkman, enters Frick’s office, intending to assassinate him. Berkman believes the Homestead workers will be able to win their strike and achieve better working conditions, and that downtrodden workers across the country will be encouraged if Frick were out of the picture. Berkman, who has never handled a gun before, shoots Frick in the shoulder and in the neck, then drops the gun in a scuffle with Frick. Berkman then stabs him three times with a dagger. Frick’s injuries are not severe. He is handling correspondence from his bed the next morning, and he is back at work ten days later. Berkman is sentenced to 22 years in prison.
NARRATOR: Scene Six: Amalgamated Association meeting, November, 1892

By November it is clear that the Striking workers cannot hold out against the power of the company. The immigrant steelworkers, who are the lowest paid to begin with, have no further reserves to take care of their families. They must go back to work. The nation’s sympathies are redirected after the Berkman attack on Frick. Even though the steelworkers union has no connection to radicalism of any kind, and has not requested or approved of Berkman’s “help,” press reports tended to increase public suspicion of labor unions. For many people around the country, strikes and labor unions are associated with dangerous violence and radical, “un-American” ideas. Over 100 union leaders are arrested and charged with murder of the Pinkertons (though they were eventually acquitted of the charges). In early November the remaining strikers hold a meeting, acknowledge that their strike is doomed, and vote to go back to work on Frick’s terms. The steelworkers’ union is destroyed, achieving the results that Carnegie and Frick had originally desired—running the Carnegie Company without interference from the workers. However, reflecting on the Homestead Strike, Carnegie writes in a letter, “the false step was made in trying to run the Homestead Works with new men. It is a test to which workingmen should not be subjected. It is expecting too much of poor men to stand by and see their work taken by others... The pain I suffer increases daily. The Works are not worth one drop of human blood. I wish they had sunk.” In 1920, Carnegie wrote in his autobiography, “Nothing... in all my life, before or since, wounded me so deeply... No pangs remain of any wound received in my business career save that of Homestead.”

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the constitutional principles that are relevant to the Homestead Strike.
2. What social and/or economic problems are evident leading up to the Homestead Strike?
3. What methods to bring about social change are attempted in the events of the Homestead Strike? Evaluate the chances for success of each of the methods you identify.
4. To what extent and in what ways are First Amendment or other constitutional protections evident in the Homestead Strike, its causes and its consequences?
PARTS
1. George Pullman, inventor of the railway sleeping car and president of Pullman Company
2. Pullman Palace Car Workers (multiple)
3. Pullman Company management
4. American Railway Union (ARU) (multiple)
5. Eugene V. Debs, President of ARU
6. General Managers Association (GMA)
7. Strikebreakers (multiple)
8. Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld
9. President Grover Cleveland
11. Federal Judge Peter S. Grosscup
12. Federal Judge William A. Woods
13. 2000 Federal troops (multiple)
14. Narrator

NARRATOR: Scene One: Pullman Company Town near Chicago, Illinois, September 1893 – May 1894

George Pullman announces that, due to the business slowdown during the depression, it is necessary to fire about one-third of the Palace Car Company workers and cut wages by more than 25 percent. At the same time, he refuses to lower rent in the company town, where most Palace Car Company workers are required to live. Workers grumble, but realize that they are fortunate to have jobs and homes at all during a depression, and that they have few options.

NARRATOR: Scene Two: Pullman Company Town near Chicago, Illinois, Spring 1894

Workers at the Pullman factory join the American Railway Union and form a committee to negotiate with Pullman management. Management refuses all of the workers’ demands and fires three members of the workers’ committee. Workers, desperate now because the rent eats up virtually their entire paycheck, decide to go on strike. The next day, George Pullman shuts down the plant. Workers call on Eugene V. Debs and the American Railway Union to support the strike. Pullman management works with 24 railroad companies to form the General Managers Association, in order to develop a nation-wide strategy to defeat the American
Railway Union and the strikers. They agree to immediately fire any railroad worker who refuses to move rail cars.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Three: Railroads in and around Chicago, Illinois, June 1894

Rail traffic near Chicago is paralyzed because ARU members refuse to handle Pullman cars. Union members offer to operate mail trains, but Railroad management officials insist on attaching Pullman cars to mail trains. The strike spreads to railroad workers across the country. Railroad companies fire strikers and hire large numbers of Strikebreakers.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Four: Washington, D.C. and Springfield, Illinois, June 1894

President Grover Cleveland threatens to become involved; he refers to his responsibility to protect and maintain mail service, as well as prevent disruptions to interstate trade. He says he will send troops if necessary to stop the strike and restore the railroads to normal business. Illinois Governor Altgeld protests, saying the strike is peaceful, the unions have legitimate grievances, and he can prevent disorder by calling on Chicago police and state militia (Remember Gov. Altgeld’s sympathy for the men convicted following the Haymarket Riot; he had pardoned the surviving prisoners in 1892).

**NARRATOR:** Scene Five: Chicago, Illinois, July 2 - 4, 1894

The General Managers Association works with U.S. Attorney General Richard Olney to secure a federal injunction (court order) against the strikers. Federal judges Peter S. Grosscup and William A. Woods rule that the strike is illegal under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and order strikers to report to work. When strikers do not return to work the next day, President Cleveland sends more than 2000 Federal troops to crush the strike. The strike prior to this point has been mostly peaceful, but strikers react angrily upon the arrival of troops. They fight against the soldiers, derailing trains, destroying railroad property, and setting widespread fires. In Chicago, at least 13 people are killed and 53 are seriously injured.

**NARRATOR:** Scene Six: Chicago, Illinois, mid-July, 1894

Debs and several other union leaders refuse the court order and are arrested for interfering with the mail. Debs realizes the strike is doomed, orders the American Federation of Labor to urge affiliate unions to go back to work, and many railroad workers resume their old jobs at the previous pay. However, workers who participated in leadership positions in their local unions are blacklisted, meaning no railroad
The strike in Chicago and in other major railroad centers around the country collapses by early August.

NARRATOR: **Scene Eight: historical significance**

The Pullman Strike was the first labor uprising in which company management and the federal government collaborated through a federal injunction to stop a strike. Like the other labor uprisings of the Gilded Age, the Pullman Strike was unsuccessful for the workers. Also, press reports contributed to labor unions in general being blamed for cultivating an atmosphere of violence. With public opinion running largely against labor unions, they lost members and influence until the 1930s. **Debs** used his six months in prison to read the works of Karl Marx, and Debs announced in 1897 that he was a socialist. He later became the founder of the American Socialist Party, and ran unsuccessfully for president in 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920.

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**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Many newspapers published articles criticizing Eugene V. Debs and other labor leaders for promoting dangerous and radical ideas as well as cultivating an atmosphere that encouraged violence. Based on your understanding of the Pullman Strike, to what extent do you think such newspaper reporting was fair and accurate?

2. Explain the constitutional principles that are relevant in the events surrounding the Pullman Strike.

3. What social and/or economic problems are evident leading up to the Pullman Strike?

4. What methods to bring about social change are attempted in the events of the Pullman Strike? Evaluate the chances for success of each of the methods you identify.

5. To what extent and in what ways are First Amendment guarantees or other constitutional protections evident in the Pullman Strike, its causes and its consequences?
Work with partners as your teacher directs to complete the table comparing these events. Discuss the questions below and prepare for a class discussion regarding social and economic change. Some sections of the table are filled in for your reference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Workers’ Grievances</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haymarket Riot, 1886, Chicago</td>
<td>Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick</td>
<td>Demand for 8-hour workday; McCormick management’s use of strikebreakers; police violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homestead Strike, 1892, Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, PA.</td>
<td>30 years after the strike, Carnegie writes in his autobiography that he deeply regrets the use of strikebreakers, pitting one group of poor men against another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pullman Strike, 1894, Chicago and other major railroad cities</td>
<td>Management refuses all worker demands, fires worker leaders, and operates railroads with strikebreakers.</td>
<td>Workers are fired and wages cut due to economic depression, but rents are not lowered in Pullman company town.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Labor Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haymarket Riot, 1886, Chicago</td>
<td>None, though many people associate the violence and disorder with the Knights of Labor, since that union welcomed immigrants and workers of all types.</td>
<td>Union refuses the new contract offered by Frick in 1892. 3000 non-union workers agree to strike, supporting the union demands. Rallies and picketing are peaceful. Strike continues a total of 5 months before workers must call off the strike &amp; go back to work on Frick’s terms. Steelworkers’ union is ultimately destroyed due to its inability to negotiate successfully for workers’ needs.</td>
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<td>Police Action</td>
<td>300 Pinkerton agents arrive by barge at midnight.</td>
<td>Pres. Cleveland orders 2000 federal troops into Chicago to stop the strike and restore order, over Gov. Altgeld’s objections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Outnumbered Pinkerton agents battle with townspeople &amp; strikers, resulting in several deaths &amp; other casualties. Frick asks PA governor to send in National Guard to restore order. Alexander Berkman, seeking to support the workers, attempts to assassinate Frick in his office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal Action</td>
<td>1886: 8 anarchists, most of whom are German immigrants, are tried. Jury finds defendants guilty of murder. Judge Gary rules that the anarchists had incited the bomb-throwing, in spite of lack of evidence against them, &amp; sentences 7 of them to be executed. One commits suicide; 4 others are hanged.</td>
<td>The Pullman strike is the first labor uprising in which the federal government uses an injunction to support management. Debs &amp; other union leaders are imprisoned.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Public Opinion</td>
<td>Government Action</td>
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<td><strong>Haymarket Riot, 1886, Chicago</strong></td>
<td>Public opinion across the country is sympathetic to the strikers until Berkman's attempt to assassinate Frick. Then, public sympathies shift as people associate the union with disorder and violence.</td>
<td>Gov. Altgeld pardons the surviving prisoners in 1893.</td>
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<td><strong>Homestead Strike, 1892, Carnegie Steel Mill, Homestead, PA.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Pullman Strike, 1894, Chicago and other major railroad cities</strong></td>
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</table>
## Constitutional Principles and Essential Virtues

### Directions
Use these checklists in your discussion of the examples of labor strife in this lesson. In what ways are the principles and virtues demonstrated? In what aspects of the events are they decidedly absent?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Checks and balances</td>
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<td>Due process</td>
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<td>Equality</td>
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<td>Federalism</td>
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<td>Freedom of contract</td>
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<td>Freedom of speech, press, &amp; assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
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<td>Explanation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inalienable rights</td>
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<td>Limited government</td>
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<td>Private property</td>
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<td>Rule of law</td>
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<td>Separation of powers</td>
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<td>Others?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essential Virtues</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
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<td>Civil discourse</td>
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<td>Courage</td>
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<td>Others?</td>
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REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How productive are forms of violence, such as bomb-throwing, in achieving beneficial ends related to social and economic reform? Based on your study of these events, what tips do you recommend to reformers desiring to carry out beneficial social and economic change within a constitutional republic characterized by limited government and respect for individual rights?

2. Discuss the relative duties of a free and responsible press and a vigilant and rational public in understanding current events to make wise decisions about public affairs.