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# DISSENT, DEPRESSION, AND WAR

## THE 1890s

## Populist Party Platform, July 4, 1892

### Preamble

Assembled upon the 116th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the People's Party of America, in their first national convention, invoking upon their action the blessing of Almighty God, puts forth, in the name and on behalf of the people of this country, the following preamble and declaration of principles:

The conditions which surround us best justify our cooperation: we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized; most of the States have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling-places to prevent universal intimidation or bribery. The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled; public opinion silenced; business prostrated; our homes covered with mortgages; labor impoverished; and the land concentrating in the hands of the capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self-protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages; a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn, despite the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes — tramps and millionaires.

The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders; a vast public debt, payable in legal tender currency, has been funded into gold-bearing bonds, thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people. Silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history, has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor; and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers, bankrupt enterprise, and enslave industry. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met and overthrown at once, it forebodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. They have agreed together to ignore in the coming campaign every issue but one. They propose to drown the outcries of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff, so that capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, trusts, watered stock, the demonization of silver, and the oppressions of the usurers may all be lost sight of. They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires.

*The People's Party Paper* (July 1892); reprinted in Norman Pollack, *The Populist Mind* (Old Tappan, NJ: Macmillan, 1967), 60-66.

**P**rofound moral conflict generated intense strife during the 1890s. Many Americans believed that the basic principles of order in the economy, in society, and in politics were immoral and unjust. Numerous others believed the opposite. The Populists voiced some of the moral doubts, while their opponents reaffirmed their faith in the conventional virtues. This conflict was more than a debate, as African Americans, labor activists, and Filipino nationalists knew. The following documents disclose the contours of the moral conflict and some of its manifold consequences in the 1890s and beyond.

### DOCUMENT 20-1

#### Addressing the Crisis in Rural America

*Hard times in agriculture pushed farmers in the Midwest and South to organize a wide variety of local reform movements. Selling their crops in distant markets for prices that often seemed to be rigged against them, shipping their produce on railroads that manipulated rates to their disadvantage, borrowing money for land and supplies at what seemed extravagant interest rates — these and other common experiences bred a sense of helplessness that many farmers came to believe could only be overcome by cooperation and organization. The Omaha Platform of the People's party, adopted at the first national convention in 1892, expressed many rural Americans' sense of crisis. The preamble preceding the platform, which follows, was written by Ignatius Donnelly, a Minnesota reform politician and one of the party's founders.*

Assembled on the anniversary of the birthday of the nation, and filled with the spirit of the grand general and chieftain who established our independence, we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of "the plain people," with whose class it originated. We assert our purposes to be identical with the purposes of the National Constitution, "to form a more perfect union and establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity." We declare that this republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation; that it cannot be pinned together by bayonets; that the civil war is over, and that every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it; and that we must be in fact, as we are in name, one united brotherhood of freemen.

Our country finds itself confronted by conditions for which there is no precedent in the history of the world; our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must, within a few weeks or months, be exchanged for billions of dollars of commodities consumed in their production; the existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange; the results are falling prices, the formation of combines and rings, the impoverishment of the producing class. We pledge ourselves, if given power, we will labor to correct these evils by wise and reasonable legislation, in accordance with the terms of our platform. We believe that the powers of government — in other words, of the people should be expanded (as in the case of the postal service) as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.

While our sympathies as a party of reform are naturally upon the side of every proposition which will tend to make men intelligent, virtuous, and temperate, we nevertheless regard these questions — important as they are — as secondary to the great issues now pressing for solution, and upon which not only our individual prosperity but the very existence of free institutions depends; and we ask all men to first help us to determine whether we are to have a republic to administer before we differ as to the conditions upon which it is to be administered; believing that the forces of reform this day organized will never cease to move forward until every wrong is remedied, and equal rights and equal privileges securely established for all the men and women of this country.

### Platform

We declare, therefore,

First. That the union of the labor forces of the United States this day consummated shall be permanent and perpetual; may its spirit enter all hearts for the salvation of the republic and the uplifting of mankind!

Second. Wealth belongs to him who creates it, and every dollar taken from industry without an equivalent is robbery. "If any will not work, neither shall he eat." The interests of rural and civic labor are the same; their enemies are identical.

Third. We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads; and, should the government enter upon the work of owning and managing all railroads, we should favor an amendment to the Constitution by which all persons engaged in the government service shall be placed under a civil service regulation of the most rigid character, so as to prevent the increase of the power of the national administration by the use of such additional government employees.

First, *Money*. We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that, without the use of banking corporations, a just, equitable, and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed two per cent per annum, to be provided as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers' Alliance, or a better system; also, by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

(a) We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of sixteen to one.

(b) We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than fifty dollars per capita.

(c) We demand a graduated income tax.

(d) We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all state and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.

(e) We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

Second, *Transportation*. Transportation being a means of exchange and a public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people.

(a) The telegraph and telephone, like the post-office system, being a necessity for the transmission of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people.

Third, *Land*. The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien ownership of land should be prohibited. All land now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens, should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.

### Resolutions

Whereas, Other questions have been presented for our consideration, we hereby submit the following, not as a part of the platform of the People's party, but as resolutions expressive of the sentiment of this convention.

1. *Resolved*, That we demand a free ballot and a fair count in all elections, and pledge ourselves to secure it to every legal voter without federal intervention, through the adoption by the States of the unperverted Australian or secret ballot system.
2. *Resolved*, That the revenue derived from a graduated income tax should be applied to the reduction of the burden of taxation now resting upon the domestic industries of this country.
3. *Resolved*, That we pledge our support to fair and liberal pensions to ex-Union soldiers and sailors.
4. *Resolved*, That we condemn the fallacy of protecting American labor under the present system, which opens our ports to the pauper and criminal classes of the world, and crowds out our wage-earners; and we denounce the present

- ineffective laws against contract labor, and demand the further restriction of undesirable immigration.
5. *Resolved*, That we cordially sympathize with the efforts of organized workmen to shorten the hours of labor, and demand a rigid enforcement of the existing eight-hour law on government work, and ask that a penalty clause be added to the said law.
  6. *Resolved*, That we regard the maintenance of a large standing army of mercenaries, known as the Pinkerton system, as a menace to our liberties, and we demand its abolition; and we condemn the recent invasion of the Territory of Wyoming by the hired assassins of plutocracy, assisted by federal officials.
  7. *Resolved*, That we commend to the favorable consideration of the people and the reform press the legislative system known as the initiative and referendum.
  8. *Resolved*, That we favor a constitutional provision limiting the office of President and Vice-President to one term, and providing for the election of senators of the United States by a direct vote of the people.
  9. *Resolved*, That we oppose any subsidy or national aid to any private corporation for any purpose.
  10. *Resolved*, That this convention sympathizes with the Knights of Labor and their righteous contest with the tyrannical combine of clothing manufacturers of Rochester, [Minnesota,] and declares it to be the duty of all who hate tyranny and oppression to refuse to purchase the goods made by said manufacturers, or to patronize any merchants who sell such goods.

#### QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. According to the Populist platform, why was the nation on "the verge of moral, political, and material ruin"? What had the two major parties done about those problems?
2. What general principles did the Populists support, and what specific remedies did they propose? What was the proper role of government and of large corporations like railroads?
3. The Populists sought a "union of the labor forces of the United States." Who did they regard as their potential allies in such a union, and who would be excluded? Why?
4. The Populists declared that "the civil war is over, and that every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it" in order to emphasize their goal of "one united brotherhood of freemen." What were the implications of this statement for African Americans?

#### DOCUMENT 20-2

### White Supremacy in Wilmington, North Carolina

Black Southerners affiliated with the Republican party often cooperated with Populists to defeat Democrats. Such a fusion of Republicans and Populists carried North Carolina in 1894 and 1896, resulting in the election and appointment of a number of black officeholders, including the mayor and aldermen of Wilmington. In 1898, Democrats struck back with a campaign of terror and intimidation that culminated two days after their victory at the polls by what Gunner Jesse Blake called a "rebellion" that established white supremacy by killing at least twenty blacks. Blake, a Confederate veteran who participated in the

"rebellion," recalled the event for a sympathetic white writer in the 1930s. Blake's narrative, excerpted here, illustrates the explosive racism that confronted Southern blacks every day and ultimately undermined the Populist revolt in the South.

#### Gunner Jesse Blake

### Narrative of the Wilmington "Rebellion" of 1898

"So, I am going to give you the inside story of this insurrection," he proceeded, "wherein the white people of Wilmington overthrew the constituted municipal authority overnight and substituted a reform rule, doing all this legally and with some needless bloodshed, to be sure, but at the same time they eliminated the Negroes from the political life of the city and the state. This Rebellion was the very beginning of Negro disfranchisement in the South and an important step in the establishment of 'White Supremacy' in the Southland. . . ."

"The Rebellion was an organized resistance," Mr. Blake said, "on the part of the white citizens of this community to the established government, which had long irked them because it was dominated by 'Carpet Baggers' and Negroes, and also because the better element here wished to establish 'White Supremacy' in the city, the state and throughout the South, and thereby remove the then stupid and ignorant Negroes from their numerically dominating position in the government. . . ."

"The older generation of Southern born men were at their wits' end. They had passed through the rigors of the North-South war and through the tyrannies of Reconstruction when Confiscation . . . of properties without due process of law, was the rule rather than the exception. They had seen 'Forty Acres and a Mule' buy many a Negro's vote.

"Black rapists were attacking Southern girls and women, those pure and lovely creatures who graced the homes in Dixie Land, and the brutes were committing this dastardly crime with more frequency while the majority of them were escaping punishment through the influence of the powers that be.

"These old Southern gentlemen had calculated that time and time only would remove the terrors of Reconstruction, a condition that was imposed upon the conquered Southerners by the victorious Northerners, but they were not willing to sit supinely by and see their girls and women assaulted by beastly brutes.

"The better element among the Northerners in the North could not want them and their little friends to grow up amid such conditions. . . ."

"A group of nine citizens met at the home of Mr. Hugh MacRae and there decided that the attitude and actions of the Negroes made it necessary for them to take some steps towards protecting their families and homes in their immediate neighborhood, Seventh and Market Streets. . . ."

"This group of citizens, . . . referred to as the 'Secret Nine,' divided the city into sections, placing a responsible citizen as captain in charge of each area. . . ."

"The better element planned to gain relief from Negro impudence and domination, from grafting and from immoral conditions; the 'Secret Nine' and the white leaders marked time, hoping something would happen to arouse the citizenry to concerted action.

"But the 'watch-and-wait policy' of the 'Secret Nine' did not obtain for long, as during the latter part of October [1898] there appeared in the columns of [the *Wilmington* (Negro) *Daily Record*] an editorial, written by the Negro editor, Alex Manly, which aroused a state-wide revulsion to the city and state administrations then in the hands of the Republicans and Fusionists. The editorial attempted to justify the Negro rape fiends at the expense of the virtue of Southern womanhood."

Mr. Blake . . . read the following . . . editorial from [the *Wilmington Record*]:

Poor whites are careless in the matter of protecting their women, especially on the farm. They are careless of their conduct towards them, and our experience among the poor white people in the county teaches us that women of that race are not more particular in the matter of clandestine meetings with colored men, than are the white man and colored women.

Meetings of this kind go on for some time until the woman's infatuation, or the man's boldness, bring attention to them, and the man is lynched for rape.

Every Negro lynched is called a "big, burly, black brute," when in fact, many of those who have been thus dealt with had white men for their fathers, and were not only not "black" and "burly," but were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them, as is very well known to all.

"That editorial," Mr. Blake declared . . . "is the straw that broke Mister Nigger's political back in the Southland." . . .

"Excitement reigned supreme on election day and the day following," Mr. Blake said, adding that "the tension between the races was at the breaking point, as two Pinkerton detectives, Negroes, had reported to their white employers that the Negro women, servants in the homes of white citizens, had agreed to set fire to the dwellings of their employers, and the Negro men had openly threatened to 'burn the town down' if the 'White Supremacy' issue was carried in the political contest. The very atmosphere was surcharged with tinder, and only a spark, a misstep by individuals of either race, was needed to set the whites and the blacks at each other's throats.

"When Mr. Hugh MacRae was sitting on his porch on Market Street on the afternoon of the election, he saw a band of 'Red Shirts,' fifty in number, with blood in their eyes; mounted upon fiery and well caparisoned steeds and led by Mike Dowling, an Irishman, who had organized this band of vigilantes. The hot headed 'Red Shirts' paused in front of Mr. MacRae's home and the level headed Scotsman walked toward the group to learn what was amiss.

"Dowling told Mr. MacRae that they were headed for 'The Record' building to lynch Editor Manly and burn the structure. Mr. MacRae pleaded with Dowling and his 'Red Shirts' to desist in their plans. Messrs. MacRae, Dowling and other leaders of the 'Red Shirts' repaired across the street to Sasser's Drug store and there he, Mr. MacRae, showed them a 'Declaration of White Independence' that he had drawn up for presentation at a mass meeting of white citizens the next day.

"The 'Red Shirts' were finally persuaded by Mr. MacRae to abandon their plans for the lynching, but only after Mr. MacRae had called up the newspapers on the telephone and dictated a call for a mass meeting of the citizens for the next morning. . . .

"A thousand or more white citizens, representative of all walks of life . . . attended the mass meeting in the New Hanover county court house the next morning, November 10, at 11 o'clock.

"Colonel Alfred Moore Waddell, a mild mannered Southern gentleman, noted for his extremely conservative tendencies, was called upon to preside over the gathering. In addressing this meeting, Colonel Waddell said: . . . 'We will not live under these intolerable conditions. No society can stand it. We intend to change it, if we have to choke the current of Cape Fear River with (Negro) carcasses!'"

"That declaration," Mr. Blake said, "brought forth tremendous applause from the large gathering of white men at the mass meeting. . . .

"Colonel Waddell . . . announced that he heartily approved the set of resolutions which had been prepared by Mr. Hugh MacRae and which included the latter's 'Declaration of White Independence.'

"These resolutions were unanimously approved by the meeting, followed by a wonderful demonstration, the assemblage rising to its feet and cheering: 'Right! Right! Right!' and there were cries of 'Furnigate' the city with 'The Record' and 'Lynch Manly.'"

Blake then read the resolutions from the scrap book, as follows:

Believing that the Constitution of the United States contemplated a government to be carried on by an enlightened people; believing that its framers did not anticipate the enfranchisement of an ignorant population of African origin, and believing that those men of the state of North Carolina, who joined in framing the union, did not contemplate for their descendants subjection to an inferior race.

We, the undersigned citizens of the city of Wilmington and county of New Hanover, do hereby declare that we will no longer be ruled and will never again be ruled, by men of African origin.

This condition we have in part endured because we felt that the consequences of the war of secession were such as to deprive us of the fair consideration of many of our countrymen. . . .

"Armed with a Winchester rifle, Colonel Waddell ordered the citizens to form in front of the Armory for an orderly procession out to 'The Record' plant. . . .

"As this band of silent yet determined men marched up Market Street it passed the beautiful colonial columned mansion, the Bellamy home. From the balcony of this mansion, a Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Salmon P. Chase, delivered an address shortly after Lincoln's tragic assassination, advocating Negro suffrage and thereby sowing the seeds that were now blossoming forth into a white rebellion.

"The printing press of 'The Record' was wrecked by the maddened white men, who also destroyed other equipment, and the type that had been used in producing the editorial that had reflected upon the virtue and character of Southern womanhood was scattered to the four winds by these men, who stood four square for the virtue of their women and for the supremacy of the white race over the African.

"Some lamps that had been hanging from the ceiling of the plant were torn down and thrown upon the floor, which then became saturated with kerosene oil; and then a member of the band struck a match, with the result that the two-story frame building was soon in flames.

"The leaders and most of the citizens had designed only to destroy the press," Mr. Blake averred, adding . . . "all of which proves that a mob, no matter how well disciplined, is no stronger than its weakest link.

"The crowd of armed men, which had destroyed the plant and building of the nefarious *Wilmington* (Negro) *Daily Record*, dispersed, repairing peacefully to their respective homes," Mr. Blake said.

"But in about an hour the tension between the two races broke with the shooting of William H. (Bill) Mayo, a white citizen, who was wounded by the first shot that was fired in the Wilmington Rebellion as he was standing on the sidewalk near his home. . . . Mayo's assailant, Dan Wright, was captured by members of the Wilmington Light Infantry and the Naval Reserves after he had been riddled by 13 bullets. Wright died next day in a hospital.

"Then the 'Red Shirts' began to ride and the Negroes began to run. . . . The Africans, or at least those Negroes who had foolishly believed in the remote possibility of social equality with the former masters of their parents, began to slink before the Caucasians. They, the Negroes, appeared to turn primal, slinking away like tigers at bay, snarling as they retreated before the bristling bayonets, barking guns and flaming 'Red Shirts.'

"Six Negroes were shot down near the corner of Fourth and Brunswick Streets, the Negro casualties for the day — November 11, 1898 — totaling nine. One of these, who had fired at the whites from a Negro dance hall, 'Manhattan,' over in 'Brooklyn,' was shot 15 or 20 times. . . .

"One 'Red Shirt' said he had seen six Negroes shot down near the Cape Fear Lumber Company's plant and that their bodies were buried in a ditch. . . . Another 'Red Shirt' described the killing of nine Negroes by a lone white man, who killed them one at a time with his Winchester rifle as they filed out of a shanty door in 'Brooklyn' and after they had fired on him. . . . Another told of how a Negro had been killed and his body thrown in Cape Fear River after he had approached two white men on the wharf. . . .

"Other military units came to Wilmington to assist the white citizens in establishing 'White Supremacy' here. . . . Military organizations from as far South as New Orleans telegraphed offering to come here if their services were needed in the contest.

"When the Rebellion was in full blast 'The Committee of Twenty-five' appointed . . . a committee to call upon Mayor Silas P. Wright and the Board of Aldermen and demand that these officials resign. The mayor had expressed a willingness to quit, but not during the crisis. He changed his mind, however, when he saw white citizens walking the streets with revolvers in their hands. The Negroes, too, had suddenly turned submissive, they were carrying their hats in their hands. . . .

"African continued to cringe before Caucasian as the troops paraded the streets, as the guns barked and the bayonets flared, for a new municipal administration of the 'White Supremacy' persuasion had been established in a day! The old order of Negro domination over the white citizenry had ended."

#### QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. According to Blake, why did the "better element" want "to establish 'White Supremacy' in the city, the state, and throughout the South"? How did Blake's characterization of the behavior of African Americans serve his own political agenda?
2. Why did an editorial in the local newspaper precipitate violence, according to Blake? Who was offended by the editorial? Why?

3. Who was responsible for the violence? Why did it occur?
4. To what extent did the Declaration of White Independence express the views of all whites? How did the declaration undermine partisan loyalties of white voters?

#### DOCUMENT 20-3

### *Pinkertons Defeated at Homestead*

*Corporations sometimes used private armies to defeat strikes. When strikers seized the Homestead steel mill in 1892, Henry Clay Frick hired an army of 300 men from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, loaded them on barges, and ordered them to launch an amphibious attack on the mill. One of the Pinkerton men (called "guards," in reference to guarding the steel mill) later recalled for a congressional inquiry his experience as an industrial mercenary at Homestead. His testimony documents the bitter strife between working people and industrialists and their supporters during the 1890s.*

#### *Pinkerton Guard Testimony, 1893*

We started out [in Chicago] . . . [and] we went into the three rear cars of the train very quickly. . . . [Men who seemed to be detectives and not patrolmen, stationed themselves at the doors, and they prevented our exit, and they prevented the entrance of any outside parties who might wish to enter. . . .

We ran rather slowly — it was not a scheduled train — on to Cleveland. . . . There we waited for an hour and our three cars were joined to seven other cars of men from the east. We then, the whole train, went rapidly on. . . . During our trip we were not allowed to leave the cars at all, we were kind of prisoners. We did not have any rights. That might have been because they were afraid of union men, perhaps spies, who would telegraph ahead to Homestead. They wanted to get inside the works without bloodshed, but we had no rights whatever. Then we entered the boats, some 300 of us. There was two covered barges, like these Mississippi covered boats. . . .

We were told to fall in, and the roll of our names was called, and we were told to secure our uniforms, which consisted of coat, hat, vest, and pair of trousers. When we had secured our uniforms we were some distance down the river, and we were told to keep quiet, and the lights were turned out, and everything kept very quiet until we were given orders softly to arise. I was lying down about an hour when the order was sent around the boat for all the men to get ready to land. Then the captain called out for men who could handle rifles. I did not want to handle a rifle, and then he said we want two or three men here to guard the door with clubs, so I said I would do that, and I got over the table and got a club like a policeman's club to guard the side door — that was to prevent men from coming in boats and jumping on to our barge from the river. I stayed there while the men who could handle rifles were marched down to the open end of the boat, and I did not see anything more of them until the firing commenced. . . .

I had a curiosity to see what was going on on the bank. . . . I saw what appeared to be a lot of young men and boys on the bank, swearing and cursing and having large sticks. I did not see a gun or anything. They were swearing at our men. I did not see any more. . . . I heard a sharp pistol shot, and then there were 30, 40, or 100 of them, and our men came running and stampeding back as fast as they could and they got in the shelter of the door, and then they turned around and blazed away. It was so dark I could see the flames from the rifles easily. They fired about 50 shots — I was surprised to see them stand up, because the strikers were shooting also but they did not seem to be afraid of being hit. They had some shelter from the door. They fired in rather a professional manner I thought. The men inside the Chicago boat were rather afraid at hearing the rifles, and we all jumped for rifles that were laying on a table ready, and someone . . . opened a box of revolvers, and said, "all get revolvers," so I had now a Winchester rifle and a revolver. I called out to see if anybody had been hurt, and I saw a man there apparently strangling. He had been shot through the head, and he died some time afterwards, I think. . . . Of course it rather made us incensed to be shot at that way, but I kept out of danger as much as possible.

I was standing there when Nordrum came up, and he said to follow him, and I crossed over to the New York boat, where there were 40 men with rifles standing on the edge of the boat watching what was going on on shore. Nordrum spoke to the men on shore. He spoke in rather a loud manner — say a commanding manner. He said: "We are coming up that hill anyway, and we don't want any more trouble from you men." The men were in the mill windows. The mill is iron-clad. There were a few boys in sight, but the men were under shelter, all of them. I supposed I should have to go up the hill, and I didn't like the idea very well, because it was pretty nearly certain death, as I supposed. I thought it over in what little time I had, and I thought I would have to go anyway. While I was standing there, waiting for Nordrum to charge up the hill and we follow him, he went away, and he was gone quite a few minutes. I took advantage of that to look around the New York men's boat to see what was going on, and I saw about 150 of the New York men hiding in the aisle furthest from the shore. It was divided into bunks. They were hiding in the bunks — they were hiding under the mattresses; they didn't want to be told to shoulder a rifle and charge up the hill, they were naturally afraid of it. They were watchmen, and not detectives. Now the men who had the rifles were mostly [Pinkerton] detectives. There were 40 of the detectives, who I afterwards learned were regular employees of Pinkerton, but these other men were simply watchmen, and hired as watchmen, and told so, and nothing else. Seeing these men so afraid and cowering rather dispirited the rest of us, and those who had rifles — I noticed there seemed to be a fear among them all. I went to the end of the boat, and there I saw crowds on the bank, waving their hands, and all looking at the boat and appearing to be very frantic.

I judged we were going to have trouble and went back to the end where I had been placed and waited for Nordrum to come, but he did not turn up, and after I stood there about half an hour I concluded, as there was no one there to order us to do anything and as it was stated that the steam tug had pulled out, taking all those who had charge of us — I concluded I would look out for my life, and if anything was said about my leaving and not staying there I would say I did not intend to work for them any more; so I returned to the door I was told to guard, and in that place I stayed for the remainder of the day, during all the shooting and firing. I concluded if the boat was burned — we expected a thousand

men would charge down the embankment and put us to massacre; that was what we expected all throughout the day — I concluded if the boat was burned I would defend my life with the other men. . . . During this firing there was a second battle. I was out of sight, but there were cracks of rifles, and our men replied with a regular fusillade. It kept up for ten minutes, bullets flying around as thick as hail, and men coming in shot and covered with blood. . . .

A good many of the men were thoroughly demoralized. They put on life-preservers and jumped under the tables and had no control over themselves whatever. Through the rest of the day there was this second battle when the strikers started the firing. There seemed to be sharpshooters picking us off. . . . [A]bout 12 o'clock barrels of burning oil were floating around the bank to burn us up, to compel us to go on the wharf and there shoot us down, but they didn't succeed because the oil was taken up by the water, and at about 1 o'clock a cannon was fired by the strikers. . . . At about 3 o'clock we heard something; we thought was a cannon, but it was dynamite. . . . It partially wrecked the other boat. A stick of it fell near me. It broke open the door of the aisles, and it smashed open the door, and the sharpshooters were firing directly at any man in sight. . . . Most of the men were for surrender at this time, but the old detectives held out and said, "If you surrender you will be shot down like dogs; the best thing to do is to stay here." We could not cut our barges loose because there was a fall below, where we would be sunk. We were deserted by our captains and by our tug, and left there to be shot. We felt as though we had been betrayed and we did not understand it, and we did not know why the tug had pulled off and didn't know it had come back. About 4 o'clock some one or other authorized a surrender. . . . [T]he strikers held that we should depart by way of the depot.

That surrender was effected, and I started up the embankment with the men who went out, and we were glad to get away and did not expect trouble; but I looked up the hill and there were our men being struck as they went up, and it looked rather disheartening. . . . I supposed there was not going to be any more crowds, but in front of the miners' cottages there were crowds of miners, women, etc., and as we all went by they commenced to strike at us again, and a man picked up a stone and hit me upon the ear. . . . I got on further toward the depot and there were tremendous crowds on both sides and the men were just hauling and striking our men, and you would see them stumble as they passed by. I tried to get away from the crowd. . . . so I put my hat on and walked out of the line of Pinkerton men, but some one noticed me, and I started to run and about 100 got after me. I ran down a side street and ran through a yard. I ran about half a mile I suppose, but was rather weak and had had nothing to eat or drink and my legs gave out, could not run any further, and some man got hold of me by the back of my coat, and about 20 or 30 men came up and kicked me and pounded me with stones. I had no control of myself then. I thought I was about going and commenced to scream, and there were 2 or 3 strikers with rifles rushed up then and kept off the crowd and rushed me forward to a theater, and I was put in the theater and found about 150 of the Pinkerton men there, and that was the last violence offered me.

#### QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did the Pinkerton men travel in secrecy? What did this Pinkerton guard mean by saying he had no rights? Once he was on the barge, what did he see on shore?

2. What was the Pinkerton man's opinion of the strikers? What was his view of the other Pinkerton detectives?
3. Why did he feel betrayed? What was his principal goal? What were the strengths and weaknesses of solidarity among the Pinkertons and among the strikers?
4. What happened to him after the Pinkerton men surrendered? Who saved him?
5. What did the use of the Pinkerton men by the Carnegie Steel Company suggest about the rule of law at Homestead?

## DOCUMENT 20-4

### *Conflicting Views about Labor Unions*

*Many employers vehemently opposed labor unions while many working people just as vehemently defended them and — more important — joined them. Bitter, often violent conflict between capital and labor over wages, working conditions, jobs, strikes, and boycotts fueled the debate. A forceful argument against labor unions was made in 1900 by N. F. Thompson, a representative of the Southern Industrial Convention and the Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville, Alabama, in testimony before the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor. Samuel Gompers, who served as president of the American Federation of Labor almost continuously from 1886 to 1924, defended labor unions in a letter published in 1894 — six years before Thompson's testimony — in the union journal American Federationist. Gompers's letter responded to a judge who had issued an injunction against the leaders of the strike and boycott against the Pullman Company in 1894 and who subsequently called for federal troops to suppress the strike. The arguments made by Thompson and Gompers reveal clashing views of the period's industrial order, its strengths and weaknesses, achievements and failures, virtues and vices. The debate about labor unions also highlighted fundamental disagreements about the roles of capitalists, working people, and governments on the path toward progress.*

N. F. Thompson

### *Testimony before the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor, 1900*

Labor organizations are to-day the greatest menace to this Government that exists inside or outside the pale of our national domain. Their influence for disruption and disorganization of society is far more dangerous to the perpetuation of our Government in its purity and power than would be the hostile array on our borders of the army of the entire world combined. I make this statement from years of close study and a field of the widest opportunities for observation, embracing the principal industrial centers both of the North and the South. I make this statement entirely from a sense of patriotic duty and without prejudice against any class of citizens of our common country.

If I could make this statement any stronger or clearer, I would gladly do so, for it is not until an evil or a danger is made strongly apparent that adequate

*Report of the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor, vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901), 755-57; American Federationist, vol. 1 (September 1894), 150-52.*

measures of relief are likely to be applied. That such a menace is real and not imaginary the most casual investigation of existing tendencies among the laboring classes will make the facts discernible. On every hand, and for the slightest provocation, all classes of organized labor stand ready to inaugurate a strike with all its attendant evils, or to place a boycott for the purpose of destroying the business of some one against whom their enmity has been evoked.

In addition to this, stronger ties of consolidation are being urged all over the country among labor unions with the view of being able to inaugurate a sympathetic strike that will embrace all classes of labor, simply to redress the grievances or right the wrong of one class, however remotely located or however unjust may be the demands of that class. To recognize such a power as this in any organization, or to permit such a theory to be advanced without a protest or counteracting influence, is so dangerous and subversive of government that it may justly be likened to the planting of deadly virus in the heart of organized society, death being its certain and speedy concomitant.

Organizations teaching such theories should be held as treasonable in their character and their leaders worse than traitors to their country. It is time for the plainest utterances on this subject, for the danger is imminent, and in view of the incidents that have occurred recently in strikes it can be considered little less than criminal in those who control public sentiment that such scenes are possible anywhere in this country.

This language may seem needlessly harsh and severe, but in some classes of diseases it is the sharpest knife that effects the speediest remedy, and so, in this case, if the public are to be awakened to their real danger the plainest speech becomes necessary.

No one questions the right of labor to organize for any legitimate purpose, but when labor organizations degenerate into agencies of evil, inculcating theories dangerous to society and claiming rights and powers destructive to government, there should be no hesitancy in any quarter to check these evil tendencies even if the organizations themselves have to be placed under the ban of law.

That these organizations are thus degenerating is seen in the following facts:

- (1) Many labor leaders are open and avowed socialists and are using labor organizations as the propaganda of socialistic doctrines.
- (2) These organizations are weakening the ties of citizenship among thousands of our people in that they have no other standard of community obligations than what these organizations inculcate.
- (3) They are creating widespread disregard for the rights of others equally as entitled to the protection of organized society as their own, as evidenced in every strike that occurs and the increasing arbitrariness of labor demands on their employers.
- (4) They are destroying respect for law and authority among the working classes, as many have no higher conception of these than such as are embodied in the commands and demands of labor organizations and labor leaders.
- (5) They are educating the laboring classes against the employing classes, thus creating antagonisms between those whose mutuality of interests should be fostered and encouraged by every friend of good government; for the success of government hangs on no less a basis than the harmony and happiness of the people, embracing alike employers and the employed.

(6) They are demanding of Federal, State, and municipal authorities class legislation and class discrimination utterly at variance with the fundamental principles of our Government, in that they are demanding of these various authorities the employment of only union labor, thus seeking to bring the power of organized society to crush out all nonunion workers.

(7) They are destroying the right of individual contract between employees and employers and forcing upon employers men at arbitrary wages, which is unjust alike to other labor more skilled, and to capital, which is thus obliged to pay for more than it receives in equivalent.

(8) They demand the discharge of men who risk life to protect employers' interests during strikes to reinstate those who were formerly employed, but who have been instrumental, directly or indirectly, in the destruction of life and property, thereby placing a premium upon disloyalty and crime.

(9) They are bringing public reproach upon the judicial tribunals of our Country by public abuse of these tribunals and often open defiance of their judgments and decrees, thus seeking to break down the only safeguards of a free people. . . .

A further law should be enacted that would make it justifiable homicide for any killing that occurred in defense of any lawful occupation, the theory of our government being that anyone has a right to earn an honest living in this country, and any endeavor to deprive one of that right should be placed in the same legal status with deprivation of life and property.

### Samuel Gompers

#### *Letter to the American Federationist, 1894*

You say that . . . you believe in labor organizations within such lawful and reasonable limits as will make them a service to the laboring man, and not a menace to the lawful institutions of the country. . . .

You would certainly have no objection . . . to workmen organizing, and in their meetings discuss perhaps "the origin of man," benignly smiling upon each other, and declaring that all existing things are right, going to their wretched homes to find some freedom in sleep from gnawing hunger. You would have them extol the virtues of monopolists and wreckers of the people's welfare. You would not have them consider seriously the fact that more than two million of their fellows are unemployed, and though willing and able, cannot find the opportunity to work, in order that they may sustain themselves, their wives and their children. You would not have them consider seriously the fact that Pullman who has grown so rich from the toil of his workmen, that he can riot in luxury, while he heartlessly turns these very workmen out of their tenements into the streets and leave to the tender mercies of corporate greed. Nor would you have them ponder upon the hundreds of other Pullmans of different names.

You know, or ought to know, that the introduction of machinery is turning into idleness thousands, faster than new industries are founded, and yet, machinery certainly should not be either destroyed or hampered in its full development. The laborer is a man, he is made warm by the same sun and made cold — yes, colder — by the same winter as you are. He has a heart and brain, and feels and knows the human and paternal instinct for those depending upon him as keenly as do you.

What shall the workers do? Sit idly by and see the vast resources of nature and the human mind be utilized and monopolized for the benefit of the comparative few? No. The laborers must learn to think and act, and soon, too, that only by the power of organization, and common concert of action, can either their manhood be maintained, their rights to life (work to sustain it) be recognized, and liberty and rights secured.

Since you say that you favor labor organizations within certain limits, will you kindly give to thousands of your anxious fellow citizens what you believe the workers could and should do in their organizations to solve this great problem? Not what they should not do. . . .

I am not one of those who regards the entire past as a failure. I recognize the progress made and the improved conditions of which nearly the entire civilized world are the beneficiaries. I ask you to explain . . . how is it that thousands of able-bodied, willing, earnest men and women are suffering the pangs of hunger? We may boast of our wealth and civilization, but to the hungry man and woman and child our progress is a hollow mockery, our civilization a sham, and our "national wealth" a chimera.

You recognize that the industrial forces set in motion by steam and electricity have materially changed the structure of our civilization. You also admit that a system has grown up where the accumulations of the individual have passed from his control into that of representative combinations and trusts, and that the tendency in this direction is on the increase. How, then, can you consistently criticize the workmen for recognizing that as individuals they can have no influence in deciding what the wages, hours of toil and conditions of employment shall be?

You evidently have observed the growth of corporate wealth and influence. You recognize that wealth, in order to become more highly productive, is concentrated into fewer hands, and controlled by representatives and directors, and yet you sing the old siren song that the working man should depend entirely upon his own "individual effort."

The school of *laissez faire*, of which you seem to be a pronounced advocate, has produced great men in advocating the theory of each for himself, and his Satanic Majesty taking the hindmost, but the most pronounced advocates of your school of thought in economics have, when practically put to the test, been compelled to admit that combination and organization of the toiling masses are essential both to prevent the deterioration and to secure an improvement in the condition of the wage earners.

If, as you say, the success of commercial society depends upon the full play of competition, why do not you and your confreres turn your attention and direct the shafts of your attacks against the trusts and corporations, business wreckers and manipulators in the food products — the necessities of the people. Why garland your thoughts in beautiful phrase when speaking of these modern vampires, and steep your pen in gall when writing of the laborers' efforts to secure some of the advantages accruing from the concentrated thought and genius of the ages? . . .

One becomes enraptured in reading the beauty of your description of modern progress. Could you have had in mind the miners of Spring Valley or Pennsylvania, or the clothing workers of the sweat shops of New York or Chicago when you grandiloquently dilate, "Who is not rich to-day when compared with his ancestors of a century ago? The steamboat and the railroad bring to his break-fast table the coffees of Java and Brazil, the fruit from Florida and California, and



the steaks from the plains. The loom arrays him in garments and the factories furnish him with a dwelling that the richest contemporaries of his grandfather would have envied. With health and industry he is a prince."

Probably you have not read within the past year of babies dying of starvation at their mothers' breasts. More than likely the thousands of men lying upon the bare stones night after night in the City Hall of Chicago last winter escaped your notice. You may not have heard of the cry for bread that was sounded through this land of plenty by thousands of honest men and women. But should these and many other painful incidents have passed you by unnoticed, I am fearful that you may learn of them with keener thoughts with the coming sleets and blasts of winter.

You say that "labor cannot afford to attack capital." Let me remind you that labor has no quarrel with capital, as such. It is merely the possessors of capital who refuse to accord to labor the recognition, the right, the justice which is the laborers' due, with whom we contend.

Inquire from the thousands of women and children whose husbands or fathers were suffocated or crushed in the mines through the rapacious greed of stockholders clamoring for more dividends. Investigate the sweating dens of the large cities. Go to the mills, factories, through the country. Visit the modern tenement houses or hovels in which thousands of workers are compelled to eke out an existence. . . . Ascertain from employers whether the laborer is not regarded the same as a machine, thrown out as soon as all the work possible has been squeezed out of him.

Are you aware that all the legislation ever secured for the ventilation or safety of mines, factory or work-shop is the result of the efforts of organized labor? Do you know that the trade unions were the shield for the seven-year-old children . . . until they become somewhat older? And that the reformatory laws now on the statute books, protecting or defending . . . both sexes, young and old, from the fond care of the conquerors, were wrested from Congresses, legislatures and parliaments despite the Pullmans. . . .

By what right, sir, do you assume that the labor organizations do not conduct their affairs within lawful limits, or that they are a menace to the lawful institutions of the country? Is it because some thoughtless or overzealous member at a time of great excitement and smarting under a wrong may violate . . . a law or commit an improper act? Would you apply the same rule to the churches, the other moral agencies and organizations that you do to the organizations of labor? If you did, the greatest moral force of life to-day, the trade unions, would certainly stand out the clearest, brightest and purest. Because a certain class (for which you and a number of your colleagues on the bench seem to be the special pleaders) have a monopoly in their lines of trade, I submit that this is no good reason for their claim to have a monopoly on true patriotism or respect for the lawful institutions of the country.

Year by year man's liberties are trampled under foot at the bidding of corporations and trusts, rights are invaded and law perverted. In all ages wherever a tyrant has shown himself he has always found some willing judge to clothe that tyranny in the robes of legality, and modern capitalism has proven no exception to the rule.

You may not know that the labor movement as represented by the trades unions, stands for right, for justice, for liberty. You may not imagine that the issuance of an injunction depriving men of a legal as well as a natural right to

protect themselves, their wives and little ones, must fail of its purpose. Repression or oppression never yet succeeded in crushing the truth or redressing a wrong.

In conclusion let me assure you that labor will organize and more compactly than ever and upon practical lines, and despite relentless antagonism, achieve for humanity a nobler manhood, a more beautiful womanhood and a happier childhood.

#### QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. Why were labor unions "the greatest menace to this Government," according to Thompson? How did Gompers's arguments respond to such claims? How did Thompson and Gompers differ in their views of strikes?
2. In what ways did labor unions violate the rights of others, according to Thompson? What workers' rights and liberties did Thompson recognize?
3. How did Gompers and Thompson differ in their beliefs about the benefits and liabilities of competition? Why was government important to each of them?
4. How did Gompers respond to accusations that labor unions were treasonous? Did Gompers oppose capitalism and industrialization?
5. How did Thompson and Gompers view the future? How did they differ in their assumptions about a just society?

#### DOCUMENT 20-5

### Mark Twain on the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust

*Many Americans welcomed the war against Spain in 1898. The notion of American soldiers liberating colonists from a decaying monarchy had wide appeal. But the temptation to start an American overseas empire in the Philippines proved irresistible. Mark Twain wrote a bitter satire that ridiculed official claims that it was necessary to take over the Philippines in order to spread the virtues of American civilization to backward Filipinos, whom Twain termed the "Person Sitting in Darkness." Twain's satire made clear that the burgeoning American empire was a betrayal of fundamental national values. Selections from Twain's essay "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" follow.*

#### To the Person Sitting in Darkness, February 1901

[S]hall we go on conferring our Civilization upon the peoples that sit in darkness, or shall we give those poor things a rest? Shall we bang right ahead in our old-time, loud, pious way, and commit the new century to the game; or shall we sober up and sit down and think it over first? Would it not be prudent to get our Civilization-tools together, and see how much stock is left on hand in the way of Glass Beads and Theology, and Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, and Trade-Gin

Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," *North American Review* (February 1901), 461-73.