

The 1892 Homestead Strike: A Story of Social Conflict in Industrial America  
“The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap  
comforts and luxuries, is also great...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth” in *Life in the Iron-Mills*, Cecelia Tichi ed. (New York: Vanderbilt University, 1998), 153

*Father was Killed By the Pinkerton Men*

'Twas in Pennsylvania town not very long ago  
Men struck against reduction of their pay  
Their Millionaire employer with philanthropic show  
Had closed the work till starved they would obey  
They fought for a home and right to live where they had  
Toiled so long

But ere the sun had set some were laid low  
There're hearts now sadly grieving by that sad and bitter  
Wrong, God help them for it was a cruel blow.

CHORUS

God help them tonight in their hour of affliction  
Praying for him whom they'll ne'er see again  
Hear the poor orphans tell their sad story  
"Father was killed by the Pinkerton men."

Ye prating politicians, who boast protection creed,  
Go to Homestead and stop the orphans' cry,  
Protection for the rich man ye pander to his greed,  
His workmen they are cattle and may die.  
The freedom of the city in Scotland far away  
'Tis presented to the millionaire suave,  
But here in Free America with protection in full sway  
His workmen get the freedom of the grave.

CHORUS

God help them tonight in their hour of affliction  
Praying for him whom they'll ne'er see again  
Hear the poor orphans tell their sad story  
"Father was killed by the Pinkerton men."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Milton Meltzer, "Father was killed by the Pinkerton Men" reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 41

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## **Part 1. Introduction**

No trained soldiers were present on July 6, 1892, when a battle erupted on the banks of the Monongahela River at Homestead, Pennsylvania. Instead, a desperate group of striking steel workers using a motley assortment of personal firearms fought to defend the Homestead Steel Works and their jobs from an army of 300 Pinkerton detectives attempting to land in two boats. By the end of the day ten people were dead, blood stained the river banks, and the Pinkertons' boats burned. Homestead had just seen one of the bloodiest days in American labor history.

Steel made possible the rise of modern, industrial America following the Civil War. In addition to its many other uses, steel was needed for railroad tracks, it allowed for the construction of skyscrapers, and it armored America's new navy, the symbol of America's power around the world. Steel's importance drove industrialists to find ways to produce it quicker and cheaper, and no one owned more steel mills or was better at producing mass quantities of cheap steel than Andrew Carnegie. The Homestead Steel Mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania was the most technologically advanced mill in Carnegie's vast empire, but it was also the last stronghold of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW), a fact which prevented Carnegie from maximizing the mill's potential production or profitability. In 1892, Carnegie determined it was time to take complete control of Homestead and initiated a lock-out of AAISW union workers, which in turn, led to a general strike, eventually erupting into violence. This paper examines the Homestead Strike of 1892 as more than simply a labor dispute; it encompassed issues rising from America's increasing stratified social order, rapid industrial growth, and uneven prosperity. The Homestead Strike dealt not only with working hours or the sliding scale, it raised questions about who controlled the Republic.

Were decisions made by the rich and powerful, or did everyone in America have a voice in deciding his/her fate?

The 1892 Homestead Strike attracted attention because its intense violence distinguished it from the numerous other labor stoppages, like the 1889 Homestead Strike. This strike resulted from rising tensions between Andrew Carnegie and the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, the skilled steel workers' labor union. These tensions came to a head when Carnegie locked out a large number of workers and refused to sign a new union contract, leading to the majority of the mill's workers walking out in a general strike. The Carnegie Company, led by Andrew Carnegie and his right-hand man Henry Frick, hired Pinkerton Guards to enter the mill and protect replacement workers being brought in to break the strike. On the July 6, 1892, the strikers tried preventing the Pinkertons from entering the mill. The two forces fought a pitched all day battle, ending in the Pinkertons' surrender. Was this violence the result of radicals and troublemaking immigrants or the result of the growing dissatisfaction in a larger segment of America's working classes? I will argue this violence was not premeditated; instead, the strikers' fears of marginalization, their need to regain a sense of agency, and the Carnegie Company's bellicose approach to the strike all combined to form a violent clash.

The battle between strikers and Pinkertons was one of America's bloodiest labor confrontations to date. Besides being simply a strike turned violent, this event showed signs of deeper class divisions. The strikers represented a broad sampling of the working class, including recent immigrants, women, and non-union members, while the Pinkertons represented the wealthy and powerful who traditionally dominated society.

The government also saw this event as the possible beginnings of a larger social upheaval and reacted to restore order and protect the status quo. The strike and its violence resulted from the strikers' complaints about the way they were treated and their right to employment with sufficient compensation. Unlike company and government fears, this strike was not controlled by a small group of radicals and the strikers did not plan on becoming violent. In many ways, the strikers' violence stemmed from their fear that they were going to be physically forced out of their jobs and homes.

This strike illustrated the paternalist attitude adopted by Andrew Carnegie and other industrialists when dealing with their workers. A result of Industrialists' adherence to Social Darwinism, paternalism grew as industry expanded. A new philosophy, Social Darwinism justified robber barons and their methods. It provided scientific 'proof' for uneven social progress and the amassing of great wealth by a small group of industrialists. In this cause, management demanded increasing obedience from labor, slowly diminishing the working class's power and robbing it of any voice in the industry. This strike was an attempt by the working classes to regain some of its lost status in the face of management's growing control over the industry.

In addition, it showed the government needed to take a larger role in mediating disputes between industrialists and workers in order to ensure that, although it did not happen in this instance, all citizens could claim an equal portion of the Republic. In this strike the government reacted out of fears of social upheaval, not prior to the strikers' battle with the Pinkertons. Still, the government appeared unsure of how to proceed during this strike; on the one hand, it could not stand by as strikers fought against Pinkertons; on the other hand, the Carnegie Company actions threatened the established

social order of Homestead as much as the violence did. In the end, the government allowed fears of spreading class violence to dictate its actions.

Obviously this strike received nationwide coverage in many periodicals, with the majority of articles published in newspapers from Pennsylvania and the northeast. These accounts are invaluable primary sources because they cover the strike from before its official inception until the strikers' bitter defeat. Newspapers took different approaches, some critical of the strikers, some of the Carnegie Company, and some of both. The newspaper articles are not unbiased accounts; they reflect society's commonly held prejudices about labor and immigrants. Reporters often sensationalized Homestead's violence by highlighting the presence of 'foreign' workers, a tactic which played on fears of anarchists and social upheaval.

Periodicals and a report from a senate investigation committee following the strike provide a glimpse of the participants and onlookers' attitudes towards the strike and each other. Unfortunately, the majority of the first-hand accounts are from the Carnegie Company's perspective of the strike. The government interviewed numerous Pinkerton's following the strike but no strikers except for Amalgamated Association leaders, most of whom were not at Homestead. The government's investigation showed a disturbing lack of working class perspective. This is probably because the government was not eager for deep-seeded social complaints to come to light which they were unprepared for and unwilling to fix. Instead, their approach to the strike involved a suppression of the strikers by trying some of their leaders for murder.

David Brody and Paul Krause are two authors who have written in-depth about the Homestead strike, and their books provide the most secondary information for this

essay. David Brody, a former professor at UC-Davis, worked primarily as a labor historian, writing mostly about the Amalgamated Association's relationship with the Carnegie Company in the context of the changing steel industry. Brody has written books on American industry dealing with a wide range of time periods and places. In his book, *Steelworkers in America*, he provides numbers for the changing union membership. In it he also describes the complicated social structure of the steel industry; how union workers, non-union workers, and different ethnic groups interacted in the changing industrial climate.

Paul Krause's *The Battle for Homestead 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* was the largest secondary source for this paper. Krause approaches the strike as a cultural event and not simply a labor dispute. He fleshes out the different individuals and groups which made up the two clashing sides to show how this strike involved a much larger section of the American public than usually thought. Krause's account differs from others because he makes sure to place Homestead within its historical context and examines the role of individual people in this strike. Krause, a Haverford graduate, reports on the involvement of ethnic minorities within the larger context of the strike. He shows how the strike was not simply about a union contract, but involved deeper issues of republicanism and the working class fears about being relegated to secondary status in society.

Andrew Carnegie must be addressed in anything having to do with Homestead because his involvement and character were too profound to ignore. As such, David Nasaw's recent biography *Andrew Carnegie* gives the best account of his life and his involvement in trying to rid his mills of the Amalgamated Association. Nasaw presented

Carnegie as a tortured man, who desired to be loved by his workers and thought of himself as a man of the people. At the same time, he held firm beliefs about the detrimental effect of unionism and the primacy of industrial progress in America. Carnegie's belief in Social Darwinism and belief in his own legacy as a self-made man both contributed heavily to his paternalistic and dismissive attitude towards labor's complaints.

## **Part 2. Who was Involved in the 1892 Homestead Strike and what did they want?**

Andrew Carnegie's attempt in 1892 to rid his Homestead Mill of the Amalgamated Association initiated a strike involving almost all of the mill's workers; despite the fact that the AAISW was an anti-immigrant, conservative, skilled trade union, factors barring most steelworkers from membership, the majority of the Homestead workers turned out to support the union's cause, overcoming ethnic as well as social divisions, and making this strike a unified movement of Homestead's working class. Through its departure from conservative, skilled labor organizing, this strike also presented a separation between the strikers' aims and the Amalgamated Association's leadership, eventually leading to the union's demise. Because of its unilateral membership the strike was a precursor to future labor organizations which would count skilled, non-skilled, native, and immigrant labor among their membership. The diverse groups of strikers were protesting their class's marginalization in industry and relegation to second-class citizens in Andrew Carnegie's and other controlling members of society's eyes.

### **2.1 Union and Nonunion Men, Changes in Labor Organization**

On July 7<sup>th</sup>, a day after the battle with the Pinkertons, the Homestead Strikers buried three of their compatriots: John E. Morris, a ten year veteran of the mill; Peter Farres, a recently immigrated Eastern European; and Silas Waine, an English laborer who came to America only two years earlier.<sup>3</sup> Besides their jobs these men had very little in common; despite the fact they all worked at the mill, it might have been impossible for

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<sup>3</sup> "Over the Bier: Funerals of Three of the Dead Homestead Mill Men", *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, July 8, 1892. reprinted in Davis P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 109

them all to communicate in one language and they may have been both skilled and unskilled laborers; nevertheless, in spite of all their differences, these men died for a common cause, the strike. Considering the wide spectrum of people involved, this event marked a change in how the American laborer thought about his position in addition to the way employers and elected officials perceived him. During this strike an alliance formed between union workers, non-union workers, American born laborers, and recent immigrants; these different groups usually operated independently of each other prior to this strike. Although it does not fully form until years later, this strike marked the beginning of a unified working class consciousness. This strike marked the death, for all intensive purposes, of skilled craft unionism, ushering in a non-union period in American industry; to be followed, eventually, by the rise of trade unions which organized all different types of labor.

In simplified terms the 1892 steel strike was a conflict between the interests of the Homestead steel workers, both union and non-union, and the Carnegie Company's management. Management sought to increase profits and lower production costs by cutting wages through introduction of a sliding scale, decreasing the workforce, and increasing mechanization in the mill. In contrast, this strike was a time in which the steel workers, both union and non-union, banded together to resist wishes of the company, wishes which they felt directly infringed upon what they saw as their natural right to work and be paid adequately.

All different types of Homestead workers largely composed the strikers' ranks; initially, members of the Amalgamated Association were locked out of their departments, in response a general strike followed with the majority of the mill's other workers refused

to continue working. Despite the overwhelming majority of non-union members among the strikers, the work stoppage began with the union leaders organizing the men. The union associated with the steel industry was the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers; it was the largest union in the United States at that time and had its largest remaining lodge located at the Homestead mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania. The breakdown of union and non-union workers was generally the same as skilled and non-skilled labor. Skilled laborers occupied a variety of jobs which required a high degree of training and experience. Examples of skilled positions in steel production included: rollers who rolled the heated steel, puddlers who made and kept steel malleable, heaters who heated the steel, and roughers who held form the steel.<sup>4</sup> Because of the training needed in these tasks, experienced workers were traditionally in higher demand and wielded more power than unskilled labor. The Amalgamated Association's organizing philosophy ran into trouble when confronted with changes caused by technological advance.<sup>5</sup> The union was not prepared for a changing, dynamic industry and proved incapable of adapting to fit its demands.

The Amalgamated Association union was a powerful force when the need for skilled workers was high; based on its control of skilled labor the union demanded good wages, hours, and working conditions for its members. Following the Civil War's initiation of an increasing demand for steel in the United States, skilled trade unions grew in power as the demand for skilled labor remained high; however, mechanization brought changes to the steel industry which co-opted many of the jobs formally done by the skilled workers. The invention of the Bessemer process together with various rolling and

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Krause, *The Homestead Strike of 1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), pg. 183

<sup>5</sup> David Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), pg. 51

roughing devices meant a majority of jobs once requiring skilled laborers were able to be preformed by machines. Demand for skilled labor fell as machines and new steelmaking processes made their jobs obsolete. This process was not immediate; instead, the AAISW, and other steel unions, declined slowly as companies upgraded mill after mill with new machinery. When the Amalgamated Association could not control steelmakers by withholding skilled labor, the union's power began to decline.

Although not apparent until skilled labor's decline in importance, a major flaw in the Amalgamated Association's organization was its closed nature; it refused to organize non-skilled laborers and discriminated against recent non-Anglo immigrants; these two groups usually coincided since recent immigrants did not have the experience necessary to work as skilled laborers. This is not to say that the union did not, simply by existing, benefit the non-members in the mill; when the union was strong and able to negotiate good terms with the company, then non-union members indirectly benefit because of the benchmark it set. Still, the simple truth was that unskilled labor vastly outnumbered skilled labor and would have provided a significant boost to the union's power if allowed to join. An estimated 60% of the workers employed in the steel industry were unskilled laborers; nevertheless, the Amalgamated Association refused to officially align with unskilled labor.<sup>6</sup>

As the union's power diminished it became increasingly obsessed with protecting its position and maintaining remnants of its former glory. It faced a variety of different problems when the importance of skilled labor decreased. Foremost of these was the decreasing number of jobs the company wanted or needed to hire skilled workers for. If the company was allowed to lay off skilled workers, then the union mechanism would

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<sup>6</sup> John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1911), pg. 4

fall apart because their members would, acting out of self-preservation, become competitors with each other for the smaller number of jobs remaining.

The Amalgamated Association was not a radical organization; especially during the period of its declining power and rapid industry change, it became increasingly focused on maintaining the status quo. It did not have the influence with management to demand new increases in worker pay or employment, so it attempted to limit its losses. Amalgamated Association president William Weihi, a former steel worker, stated his union's position, saying, "The Association never objects to improvement" and that if improvements "do away with certain jobs they make no objection, they[the union] believe in the American idea that the genius of the country should not be retarded."<sup>7</sup> The union was not equipped to operate in a rapidly changing industry; the union's policies were suited for an industry which was stable and unchanging. Union officials took a stance which agreed with many of the industry's policies and made them less of an immediate threat, rather than fighting the company, losing everything, and becoming, in their minds, no better than unskilled labor. This was a not a strong stance and led to the steel companies slowly pushing at the union's boundaries and probing to gain inch after inch in negotiations.

In talking about July 6, 1892, it is necessary to delineate between two parts of the Amalgamated Association: those who were involved in the actual occupation of the mill, and the union leaders who arrived afterwards in an effort to calm the strikers. Hugh O'Donnell led the workers' Advisory Committee, the body controlling the strike and organizing the strikers guarding the mill. In contrast, Weihi and M. M. Garland, another

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<sup>7</sup> William Weihi quoted in David Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 51

national official of the AAISW, arrived at Homestead only after the Pinkerton guards had turned themselves over to the strikers. I mention this split because it appears as if the strikers, both union and non-union men, were unwilling to go along with Weihi, and other national officials, when they tried calming the angry crowd after the Pinkertons' surrender. The events on this day marked a break with the Amalgamated Association's leadership through its members' divergence from its traditional, peaceful, and conciliatory trade unionism.

O'Donnell and Weihi represented two opposing ideas for the strikers: on the one hand, O'Donnell was a union member, still worked in the Homestead mill, was present for all of the strike, and helped keep the Pinkertons from landing in their boats; in comparison Weihi was a former steel worker, although known and well liked by the men, was no longer a consistent presence in the mill and lacked the influence O'Donnell had with the strikers. Weihi, because of his separation from the mill, no longer understood the workers' desires; O'Donnell was a fellow worker and despite his position of leadership shared his compatriots' anger at the Pinkertons' attempt to wrest their jobs from them.

The Amalgamated Association's membership split with their leaders during the strike was based partially on a loss of faith in their ability and commitment to fighting for labor's best interests. A gap between Amalgamated membership and leadership had continually grown since the union's inception, a natural process as any organization increased in size and scope. Leaders in the Amalgamated Association were chosen from within its ranks, leading to generally amiable relationships throughout the organization, but Andrew Carnegie was also fond of hiring men from within the union leadership to

come work for him. For example, William Martin had been a prominent member of the AAISW before going on to work for Carnegie's Department of Labor before leaving in 1893.<sup>8</sup> From Carnegie's point of view hiring men like William Martin made great sense; the mill provided him with young men who knew the works, were willing to work hard, and were grateful for their promotion. Still, the fact that many union leaders were deserting their cause in favor of higher wages as Carnegie's managers was not reassuring for the union rank and file. Since the union leadership appeared to be a stepping-stone for careers in management, it is possible that the workers' representatives were less forceful in their demands because they wanted to create a favorable impression with the Carnegie Company, as it might be a future employer.

The strikers viewed their defense of the mill of as part of their natural right to work, and following this logic, believed the Pinkertons should be punished; in contrast, the union's leaders with a degree of separation from the Mill believed, rightly, that the violence would negatively affect the strikers' image, and were determined to minimize the damage. Weihi arrived after the battle took place and desperately pleaded for the men to let the captured Pinkertons go, saying: "Men, for God's sake and your families' sake, and for your own sake, listen to the pleadings of cool-headed men". Weihi's attempts to convince the strikers were unsuccessful and he was shouted down. In contrast, when O'Donnell stood up to speak to the men, he received a round of cheers and was able to convince the men to release their prisoners, on the condition that they be arrested and tried for murder.<sup>9</sup> It is also interesting to note that O'Donnell, not a national figure in AAISW, wanted the Pinkertons arrested, while Weihi thought it prudent if the strikers

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead 1880-1892*, 329-330

<sup>9</sup> Arthur G. Burgoyne, "Homestead Strike of 1892" in Paul Krause. *The Battle for Homestead*, 33

just sent them on their way; and, hopefully, drawing as little extra attention to the strikers' militant actions as possible.

The union's stance of agreeing with the company on many issues, especially those which involved increased mechanization, stemmed partially from union officials' fears of being labeled as radical or un-American. If the union was seen as trying to prevent progress which could increase the stature of the country, it would a simple matter for management to associate their reluctance with radical or anti-American feelings. This process still continues today in many aspects of American life; political and industrial disagreements are often accompanied by efforts of management to label protesting workers as enemies of progress and by extension of America. The 1889 strike justified the union's fear about their reputation's precarious nature; many newspapers described the strike in terms of an assault on the social organization and a flaunting of lawful order.<sup>10</sup> This was a dangerous time for labor organization, and the Amalgamated Association with its declining power and closeness with company management took every precaution to escape a radical image. Unfortunately for the union members, this careful approach diminished the amount of force the union brought to bear for their cause, a fact which intensified the strikers' desperation, helping cause the violence seen on July 6.

The Amalgamated Association's upper echelon of leaders knew the violence at Homestead could label them as social insurgents and ruin the union. Following the strike and the battle, Weihi's comments aimed to separate the strikers into different groups, blaming some of them and discouraging the notion that Homestead was a mass

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Krause. *The Battle for Homestead*, 250

movement. When testifying before the Senate about the strike, he tried placing blame for the violence on recent southern and eastern European immigrants, claiming:

“There is a certain class of foreigners who come here and make good citizens, and I don’t think there would be any difficulty with them, it is the element not accustomed to the English language, or to the laws, rules and usages, that makes trouble.”<sup>11</sup>

Weihi displayed the Amalgamated Association’s anti-immigrant stance and also tried to play off the public perception of eastern and southern Europe as the home of socialist and radical ideas, ideas which were utterly unknown to the American worker and could only have come from troublemaking foreigners. He was incorrect in describing the violence as the fault of immigrants, and he also attempted to cover up the fact the strike involved a wide range of peoples, all of whom were angry with the company’s attempts to bypass their right to work.

The Amalgamated Association’s official stance was designed to limit the union’s decline but also displayed confusion about the union’s future. Union officials found themselves in a bind because they were unwilling to revolutionize how they organized steel industry labor; yet, at the same time, realized they were fighting a losing battle with management over mechanization, numbers of skilled laborers, and wages. Official union policy limited its decline in power through a combination of compromise with management in hopes of dissuading them from demanding too many concessions and keeping up pretenses of the Amalgamated Association’s elite nature. This plan created a confusing situation for union officials; it became unclear to what extent they were still fighting for labor or had become an extension of management.

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Senate, Report No. 1280, testimony given by William Weihi, President of the AAISW, November 24, 1892. in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”*: Homestead 1892, 65

## 2.2 Recent Immigrants in Emerging Working Class Consciousness

In 1892, the Amalgamated Association remained made of up predominately of native-born workers or men of Anglo-European origin; on the contrary, the Homestead works employed a vast number of workers from Eastern and Southern Europe, who, in turn, made up a large portion of the strikers.<sup>12</sup> The alliance of recent immigrants and Anglo-American workers demonstrates how this strike was a working class movement and not simply motivated by union concerns. Breaking with the organization of the Amalgamated Association, the striking workers included union members, non-union members, and recent southern and eastern European immigrants. Usually, these different groups did not ally with each other, preferring the company of people with whom they shared a common background. In 1892, the Carnegie Company's aggression caused all of these different peoples to fear for their future in Homestead; so, they found common ground with each other against management.

An emerging, undivided sense of the American working class could be seen in this strike because of the numbers of different groups who chose to support the strike, thus forming bonds of solidarity with their fellow workers. A major reason recent Eouthern and Eastern European immigrants took part in the strike was because they became to see themselves as citizens in American society instead of temporary residents. A majority of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe had come to the steel mills looking to work until they earned enough money to return to their home countries and purchase land. These immigrants often worked as unskilled laborers, lived in harsh conditions, and suffered the scorn of their native counterparts; they endured these trials

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, pg. 316

because they thought of them as temporary.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the immigrants' willingness to work for lower wages and in poorer conditions angered many who felt this set a poor precedent and made it harder for native workers to compete. In addition, immigrants who did not plan on staying in America were willing to work as strikebreakers, and this undermined attempts at labor organization by giving management a large pool of replacement workers. For these immigrants, the most important thing was whether any work could be had, because if not, they could not earn money to return home with.

Workers of different ethnic groups allying to protest the Carnegie Company's actions represented a triumph of American working class identity over deep-seeded ethnic prejudices. Workers who had been in the U.S. for longer and had immigrated from England and northern Europe were often suspicious of these ethnically different workers because of their darker complexions, language, and different customs. Interactions between people of different ethnic groups were limited because immigrants who arrived temporarily for work tended to settle together by country of origin; not having plans to stay indefinitely, they felt more comfortable associating predominately with their native language and customs. This changed as large numbers of immigrants decided to remain in America permanently, suddenly they were interested in their jobs as more than just temporary occupations. Their concerns became the same as those of native-born Anglo-American laborers. By setting down roots, these workers' livelihoods and futures became tied to their ability to find consistent and well paying jobs; they were no longer content to take work at any pay since their future no longer remained in Europe. In the 1892 strike, the many factors keeping different groups of workers apart were overcome

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<sup>13</sup> David Brody. *Steelworkers in America*, 96

by a common cause: the preservation of the laborer's right to work and receive adequate compensation.

The bonds between immigrant and native-born worker were not traditionally strong; nevertheless, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1892, a mass meeting of representatives to the Amalgamated Association's convention and other delegates from the mill was held to discuss the reduced scale of wages being offered by the Carnegie Company. John McLuckie, union member and Homestead Burgess, addressed the crowd, as did a Mr. B. Maverek, "an official in the Pittsburgh Slavonic[sic] order"; Mr. Maverek explained the meeting's purpose to the "Poles, Hungarians and Slavs present", helping to overcome the language divide, which usually presented the most basic barrier between cooperation between different ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup> This small but vital step towards working together showed the issues at play in 1892 involved all of Homestead's workers, not simply union members.

A much bolder step towards unifying different ethnic groups was taken on July 28<sup>th</sup> when committees of "foreigners" were organized into an Amalgamated Association lodge at Homestead. The *Pittsburgh Post* from June 20<sup>th</sup> reported:

"several hundred of these foreign workmen, comprising the better element of the Slavs and Hungarians, met last night and voted unanimously to strike when ordered, and to remain out until they were again permitted to go to work by the Amalgamated Association."<sup>15</sup>

Forming a lodge of Slavic and Hungarian workers was an unprecedented step, especially since the Amalgamated Association was virulently anti-immigrant. This comment reflected some of the common prejudices towards Hungarians and Slavs by referring to a

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<sup>14</sup> "Homestead Workmen Firm". June 20, 1892. *The Pittsburgh Post* in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, 34

<sup>15</sup> Looks Like War. June 28, 1892. *The Pittsburgh Post* in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, 41

“better element”, assuming that a natural inclination of these groups was to radicalism and troublemaking. This event did not mean the national leadership had changed its mind about its stance either, since the national body never officially ratified Homestead lodge’s actions.<sup>16</sup> Still, this event was important because it signaled the emergence of a unified working class body that struck at Homestead, and it showed the further distance between on the ground members of the Amalgamated Association and its upper echelon.

The different ethnic groups within Homestead’s steelworkers formed a common cause during this strike, but this did not mean that all prejudices and differences between them were forgotten. Non-English speaking immigrants were believed to be less capable of organizing themselves and more likely to lose control. So, the strike leaders agreed a “representative American workman be appointed to take charge” of each group of foreign workers.<sup>17</sup> The assumption of English speakers and Anglo-American workers was that the Slavic and Hungarian workers were a liability if not properly controlled. Although the formation of an agreement between different ethnic groups was a monumental occurrence, it did not mean all suspicions or inequality between workers disappeared.

The presence of non-steel workers supporting the strike showed it impacted the whole of Homestead, not just the mill and its workers. After hearing the news of the Pinkertons sailing upriver, women joined the striking men as they entered the mill. The *New York Herald* reported the women were armed with clubs and led by Margaret, or Mother, Finch, the proprietor of the Rolling Mill House, a local saloon. The *Herald* described Mother Finch as a “white haired old beldam” who marched “brandishing the

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, 320

<sup>17</sup> “Looks Like War: How the Foreigners Stand”. June 28, 1892. *The Pittsburgh Post* Reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”: Homestead 1892*, 41

hand billy she always kept around the house for just such emergencies.”<sup>18</sup> Mother Finch’s example illustrated the mill’s importance in the everyday life of Homestead and all its citizens. Margaret Finch joined in the strike despite the fact that no matter who the Carnegie Company employed they would still patronize her tavern. She, like many other women, supported the strike because she felt the Carnegie Company was denying their workers the fundamental right to work and decreasing the worker to the level of a tool or expendable resource.

Although many non-steel workers came out in support of the strike, Mother Finch showed a greater dedication than most. She actively defended the town from invasions by company guards and scabs far before strike leaders confirmed the Pinkertons’ arrival. *The Pittsburg[sic] Dispatch* reported that men met Mother Finch standing guard with her black-jack on the night of July 4<sup>th</sup>; a full two days before the Pinkertons landed.<sup>19</sup> She had lived in Homestead for a long time, and she appeared ready to defend it through fighting if the Carnegie Company tried reopening the mill with replacement workers. She was more militant in her opinions than many and felt it was her right and duty to watch for any attempts by Carnegie Company management to circumvent the strike. In spite of her fervor, her opinions described the feelings of many non-steel workers in Homestead; the mill was the property of Homestead, it needed to remain connected with the town and its citizens despite what private property law or the Carnegie Company might say.

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<sup>18</sup> “Daylight Call to Arms”. July, 7, 1892. *The New York Herald* Reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”: Homestead 1892*, 76

<sup>19</sup> “Startled by Rumors: An Old Lady Does Guard Duty”. July 5, 1892. *The Pittsburg Dispatch* reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”: Homestead 1892*, 60

As the town of Homestead's identity was inexorably tied to the mill, any attempt to shut the mill down or replace its workers constituted a blow to Homestead's very foundation. Illustrating the town's dependence on the mill, David Nasaw wrote, "Homestead was a company town --there were no other jobs available for the men who worked in the plant. Should they lose theirs, they would have to pull up stakes and leave the town and mill they had built."<sup>20</sup> Allowing the Carnegie Company to bring in cheaper, replacement laborers would have resulted in many Homesteaders losing their jobs, which, in turn, would have destroyed the town. The steelworkers were fighting to stop the Carnegie Company, through the Pinkertons, from taking away a part of their lives which they felt they should have control over. Essentially, the men and women of Homestead were fighting to keep a small group of men led by Andrew Carnegie from deciding the fate of an entire town.

The townspeople appreciated workers who fought the company during strikes and work stoppages; they were not thought of as troublemakers or social malcontents. John McLuckie, a union member and steel worker, was elected as Homestead's mayor in 1890 and 1892 after helping to organize a Pittsburgh labor demonstration in 1882.<sup>21</sup> Homestead's citizens cared about what happened at the steel mill, proudly celebrating and defending their history of labor organizing. Many peoples' lives were tied to the mill and the town's existence depended on the mill's support. Homestead did not exist without the steel mill, and the strikers wanted to ensure that their lives and homes were not stripped away from them so the price of steel would fall by a few cents.

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<sup>20</sup> David Nasaw. *Andrew Carnegie*, (New York, The Penguin Press, 2006), 415

<sup>21</sup> Susan Ware, ed., *Forgotten Heroes: Inspiring American Portraits From our Leading Historians*, (New York: Free Press, 1998), 145

The workers who struck came from both union and non-union camps. Discussing the Homestead strikers, David Brody wrote, “Homestead was in fact exceptional; for the eight lodges in the plant, despite a membership limited to 800 of the 3,800 workmen, were able to bring out almost the entire labor force.”<sup>22</sup> The labor force at Homestead came from all different backgrounds, but they unified behind the common cause of the working class to fight their increasing marginalization by big business. This strike involved social and political issues, not just economic concerns. The violence on the part of the strikers was not random and stemmed from a common frustration and belief that their cause was right.

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<sup>22</sup> David Brody. *Steelworkers in America*, 35

### **Part 3. Pinkertons, Steel Workers, and Violence in the 1892 Homestead Strike**

Ultimately, it was violence which doomed the strike and led to the Amalgamated Association's of Iron and Steel Workers almost complete destruction in the steel industry. Initially, the lockout and strike at Homestead did not involve violence; on the strikers' side it was a defensive action to keep the Carnegie Company from importing replacement workers and restarting the mill, thus circumventing the strikers' demands. The appearance of the Pinkerton guards acted as the spark to a dry field; and violence on a scale rarely, if ever, seen before in American labor battles erupted on the banks of the Monongahela. The strikers' desperation and lack of other options at the sight of the Pinkertons' barges triggered their violence reaction. Although the strikers were very aggressive in their actions, they only desired to defend what they saw as their right to work against the private interest of Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick.

#### **Part 3.1 Did the Strikers' violence Result from Class frustrations or Radical Premeditation?**

The Homestead Strike erupted into violence because of the strikers' pent up anger and frustration had no other outlet, it was not carefully planned or intended to be a radical declaration of change. The strikers' violent reaction was intentionally provoked by the Carnegie Company because management it knew the strike, and thus the Amalgamated Association, could not survive once the government deemed it radical and dangerous to social order. The strikers reacted violently, just as the company expected, but it would have been unfair to characterize the bloodshed as solely the strikers' responsibility. The Carnegie Company aggressively approached the strike hoping to incite violence. Given

the appearance of Pinkerton guards, the strikers were left with two choices: they could have either stood aside, letting the guards reopen the mill; or they could keep the guards from entering the mill, thus keeping the mill closed but dooming the strike to condemnation as a violent, radical uprising.

From the viewpoint of the Carnegie Company management, the violence at Homestead played directly into their hands; the strikers' attack on the Pinkertons made them appear to be a detriment to public order and the beginnings of a radical social movement. The radical nature which the violence colored the strike with forced Robert E. Pattison, governor of Pennsylvania, to send the state militia to Homestead in order to maintain public order. As the only combatants left at the scene were Homesteaders, and indeed as they had broken numerous laws by breaking into the mill grounds and firing on the Pinkertons, the militia commander, General Snowden, took a position contrary to their interests; the militia arrested the leaders of the strike and protected the Carnegie Company as they brought in scab workers to the Homestead works. Although a subsequent congressional investigation found the violence could have been avoided if the Carnegie Company had negotiated for longer, there was no attempt to change the strikers' fate and they had to return to the mill to beg for their jobs and the AAISW lost much of its influence in the mill. Some of the workers received lifetime bans from Carnegie's mills, effectively being blacklisted from the steel industry. Violence and the fear of social upheaval doomed the workers' cause when their initial motivations were a protection of proper social order, or what they perceived it to be, and a fear of change in the organization of industrial labor.

The Homestead strike's organizers intended to avoid violence; the strikers' main goal was to prevent the mill from being reopened with replacement workers and they understood excessive aggression on their part only harmed their cause. In order to protect against this the strikers' patrolled around the mill and watched for the approach of company officials who would try and reopen the works. This tactic was not new; the strikers used it during the 1889 labor stoppage, with great success. During the 1889 strike the workers prevented the sheriff and a group of replacement workers from entering the mill simply by barring them entry. No violence erupted in that case, and the workers thought they would be able to use the same strategy in 1892.

During the 1889 strike, the strikers attained their goals through halting labor, they never resorted to physical violence; even so, their position came under attack as a challenge to proper social order. As Paul Krause wrote, "The effective seizure of the town, the rejection of the sheriff's authority, the cheeky denial of a private concern's right to hire whomever it pleased all constituted an ominous assault on the social order that called forth the most unhappy associations of mass insurgency."<sup>23</sup> The open defiance of the public authority and the refusal to acknowledge rights to public property made many suspicious of the radicalism or socialism among the steel strikers. Memories of the 1889 strike helped influence fears about the strikers' radical nature in 1892, even before any violence had erupted. The violence only confirmed what people had feared all along, the Homestead strikers were intent on social upheaval. By instilling fears about the Homestead labor's radical nature in peoples' minds the strikers' 1889 victory helped set them up for a far greater defeat in 1892.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Krause. *The Battle for Homestead*, 250

The violent clash in 1892 between the Carnegie Company's Pinkerton guards and the Homestead strikers played on fears of radical social upheaval which helped explain the militia's decision to protect the steel company's private interest. Previous instances of labor violence were associated with radicalism and attacks of public order. In 1886, anarchists led the Haymarket march in Chicago during which a bomb went off, throwing the demonstration into violent chaos. This combination of anarchists, labor, and violence became inexorably tied in many Americans' minds. The Haymarket violence caused labor organizing to be linked with anarchist plots.<sup>24</sup> For this reason anarchist influences were assumed to be behind the violence at Homestead. In Pennsylvania, the Molly Maguires were another example which linked labor organizing and anarchist violence. The Molly Maguire's' terrorism of the anthracite region of Pennsylvania was a fresh memory of radical labor organization and the violence associated with it. Still, it was unfair of observers to paint the Homestead strikers' with the same brush as the Mollies or the anarchists at Haymarket.

Unlike the Homestead Strikers, for whom violence constituted a last, hasty recourse, previous labor organizations like the Molly Maguires regularly used violent methods in achieving their goals. In his book on American class violence, Louis Adamic characterizes the Molly Maguire's' "terrorism" and "murder" as a "sharp contrast with the ineffective regular labor organization of that time".<sup>25</sup> The Mollies carefully planned their attacks always had a specific target. This was much different than the Homesteaders frantic attempts to dislodge the Pinkertons from the river bank. While the

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<sup>24</sup> Walter Licht. *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century*, (The Johns Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1995), 170

<sup>25</sup> Louis Adamic. *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1931), 12

Mollies attack specific people, the strikers only wanted to defend their jobs.

Interestingly, Louis Adamic was a socialist and while he does not praise the Mollies' tactics, he does comment on their effectiveness. Being a socialist did not necessarily mean one was bent on violently bringing down the social order, however, frustration over the failure of peaceful attempts at change drove many socialists to support more aggressive tactics if they received results.

The Homestead strikers differed from the Mollies because prior to the strike they did not believe the social and industrial system in America was broken. Instead, their goal was protecting their jobs at the Mill, which, from their point of view, was the same as protecting the proper social order. They were not contesting the company's ownership of the mill or right to make decisions about it. They did take issue with their lack of voice in the decision making process; they thought, because of all their work in building and operating the mill, their voice should be heard in any decisions made about it. Striker James O'Boyce voiced his concerns about abandonment by the Carnegie Company, saying:

“The Carnegie mills were built up by us, the great profits of the concern were made by us. Our labor was expended for Scotch castles and library advertising. We do not say that Carnegie, Phipps & Co. do not own the mill property, but we do say that we have some rights in it ourselves.”<sup>26</sup>

O'Boyce and his fellow strikers did not question the Carnegie Company's ownership of the mill, but they felt their hard-work had earned them at least a say in how it was run. They might have thought relations between company and laborer were going increasingly awry; still, they did not want or see the need for a complete upheaval. The

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<sup>26</sup> From an Article in *The Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), July 16, 1892 reprinted in Richard Krooth. *A Century Passing: Carnegie, Steel and the Fate of Homestead*, (New York: University of America, 2004, )pg. 278

Mollies' goals were much different from the Homestead strikers; the Mollies often attacked anyone who disagreed with them, while the Homestead strikers fought a defensive battle against an aggressive company. The strikers simply wished to protect their jobs; they were not using violence as a progressive tool.

The strikers desperately feared losing their jobs, and because of this their violence carries a highly emotional and frantic feeling. There was no careful plan to destroy the Pinkertons' force, the strikers simply acted on whatever came to mind. The strikers' unfocused violence differed greatly from the Mollies' "cool, deliberate, almost impersonal killings".<sup>27</sup> The Mollies turned their violent attentions against anyone whom they thought was wronging one of their members or standing in their way. In contrast, the Homesteaders only wished to protect their jobs by preventing the importation of replacement workers; they wanted conditions in the mill to stay the same as they had been, with them remaining as employees. Storming the mill and preventing the Pinkertons from landing was a defensive violence, resulting from a lack of other options. Once roused the strikers' anger was hard to contain, they harassed and beat the captured Pinkertons as they were marched to the Opera House serving as the jail.<sup>28</sup> Still, the impromptu gauntlet the strikers made the captured Pinkertons run stemmed from an intense anger over the deaths and injuries inflicted during the battle. Harsh treatment of the Pinkertons stemmed more from frustration than any actual malice. This violence served no purpose except satisfying the workers' desire for justice after the Pinkertons' perceived "attack" on right to work.

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<sup>27</sup> Louis Adamic. *Dynamite*, 16

<sup>28</sup> Paul Krause. *The Battle for Homestead 1880-1892*, 37

In addition, the accounts of the strikers' gauntlet were probably exaggerated by newspapers and other accounts of the event. Arthur Burgoyne describes the scene in barbaric fashion, writing, "Clubs and stones were used with demoniacal ferocity", women were "converted for the nonce into veritable furies", and many Pinkertons were forced to crawl because of all the blows they received.<sup>29</sup> Burgoyne gives a grisly account of the event designed to illicit an extreme reaction more than report the facts. While there is overwhelming evidence that the Pinkertons were treated roughly after their surrender, the melee which Burgoyne describes is highly exaggerated.

Part of the fear the Mollies inspired stemmed from their clandestine nature. In contrast, the strikers were open with their meetings, going so far as to show they had nothing to hide by opening a mass meeting of workers to anyone. While Carnegie's communicated with Frick through coded telegram, Homestead's workers welcomed reporters into their pre-strike meetings. Newspapers throughout Pennsylvania and the east coast closely reported labor's actions leading up to and during the strike's initial days. No part of the strikers' organization or plans remained a secret; it was plain the strikers did not plan on resorting to violence, instead planning on using the same tactics they employed in 1889.

Unfortunately, many people following the strike possessed prejudices towards labor organization and foreigners, making them predisposed to think of the strikers as violent, social radicals. The inclusion of eastern and southern European immigrants in the strikers' ranks was evidence for many peoples' suspicions of their radical nature. In many Americans' minds, Europe, especially the eastern and southern areas, sheltered a

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur Gordon Burgoyne . *The Homestead Strike of 1892*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), , 84

variety of violent, socially contaminating ideas. Fears over socialist ideas emigrating from Europe were not completely untrue. In 1848 Karl Marx published *The Communist Manifesto*; this text outlines Marx's theory of class struggle and his planks for the communist movement. Although not necessarily violent, this text raised fears of the working class. In many peoples' minds, the Molly Maguires' Irish origins were evidence of dangerous ideas moving from Europe to Pennsylvania industry. Despite not having a violent history, the Homestead strikers were more suspicious because many of the immigrants in their ranks were not English speakers and of non-Anglo ethnicity.

The characterization of the strikers as a completely unorganized mob bent on destroying the Pinkertons and bringing about massive social changes was not accurate. Initially, the strikers were very well organized; an Advisory Committee made up of respected and intelligent men in the mill and town controlled the strike. This committee instituted progressive policies like closing the saloons and making people take down effigies of Carnegie and Frick in order to prevent drunkenness and disorderly conduct.<sup>30</sup> In addition to these efforts, the strikers exercised extreme caution when they took over the mill, to prevent any damage to the machinery. The Advisory Committee lost control of the strikers during the fight with the Pinkertons and their subsequent surrender. Since the strikers' violence stemmed from fears of attack by the Pinkertons, their surrender calmed the gathered crowds. The dissipation of anger among the strikers allowed the Advisory Committee to regain control and prevent further violence.

Despite their harsh treatment of the captured Pinkertons, the strikers' violence was not aggressive and lack anarchist motivations. The strikers never tried to stretch out

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<sup>30</sup> Arthur Gordon Burgoyne . *The Homestead Strike of 1892*, 38

beyond the borders of the mill. Andrew Carnegie and Henry Frick, the strikers' primary enemies, were never targeted by the strikers. The attack on Mr. Frick's life, although it colored many opinions about the strikers' cause, was not connected with the Homesteader strike. Instead, Alexander Berkman, an anarchist, traveled to Homestead after hearing news of the battle between the strikers and the Pinkertons and on July 23<sup>rd</sup> attempted to kill Mr. Frick by shooting and stabbing him in his office. In explaining why he felt compelled to assassinate Frick, Berkman wrote:

“The removal of a tyrant is not merely justifiable; it is the highest duty of every true revolutionist. Human life is, indeed, sacred and inviolate. But the killing of a tyrant, of an enemy of the People, is in no way to be considered as the taking of a life.”<sup>31</sup>

The sentiments expressed by Berkman were those of an anarchist who believed the time had come for the revolution. His attempt on Frick's life failed, and although he could not be linked in anyway with the Homestead strikers, his violent act tainted their cause. He claimed to be acting in their interest, so his radical ideas and revolutionary stance influenced opinions about the strikers' demands and purpose. They roundly dismissed him and his mission, but the fears of anarchy which his action played on were very strong and only continued to increase.

The state militia took a harsh stance towards the strikers because they believed them to be attacking the social order and desired, at all costs, for peace to be maintained. It was unimportant to the militia and the state government that the Carnegie Company's Pinkerton guards were the straw that broke the camel's back, providing a immediate threat to the strikers' cause and driving them to violence. General Snowden, the militia commander, occupied the town quickly by night, treating the operation as if it were a war

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<sup>31</sup> Excerpted from “Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist” by Alexander Berkman in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”*: Homestead 1892, 165

and the strikers' and townspeople as enemy combatants. The New York Times headline on July 13, 1892, read: "Gen. Snowden Means Business. The Strikers Given to Understand That Their Reign is Over", a title implying the strikers' control was an affront to the natural order, but now that the government had arrived they would put everything right again. The article reported that the General received a workers' delegation, refused their offer for four brass bands to welcome them and sternly rebuked them for being unlawful citizens.<sup>32</sup> The militia and the state political leaders' attitude towards the strikers were cold; they quickly assumed the strike's violence and disorder resulted from the strikers' actions.

### **3.2 Violence as a Result of the Carnegie Company's Actions**

The Pinkerton's appearance on boats coming up the river to Homestead was the catalyst for the violence at Homestead. In testimony given to the coroner after the battle, one of the Pinkertons, John T. McCurry, claimed the barges initially fired upon by strikers patrolling the river in skiffs and the guards in the barges did not begin to fire back until they had landed on the mill's bank.<sup>33</sup> The strikers were the first to start firing in the battle on July 6, but they were doing so out of anger and fear. The Pinkertons would have appeared an attacking army to the strikers, who had been waiting and wondering when such an attempt on the mill would come. The strikers were expecting an attack and feared it would involve Pinkertons; June 28's *Pittsburgh Post*, entitled "Looks Like War-Detectives Said to be Coming", reported the men had caught two Pinkerton spies, and giving the workers' attitude, wrote:

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<sup>32</sup> "Gen. Snowden Means Business". July 13, 1892,-*The New York Times* reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, 135

<sup>33</sup> Original Homestead Strike Materials: Coroner's Inquest Papers and Minute Book Entries From Various Unions, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA, pg. 4

“This open preparation for attack has a demoralizing influence upon the men, who have been preparing to conduct a strike, if there be any, peaceably and without violence. They do not relish the red rag of defiance flung right into their faces, and hence the talk of opposition grows.”<sup>34</sup>

The fact the Pinkertons were involved in the strike only made matters worse, since a general hatred for the Pinkerton Detective Agency existed among the laboring classes in America. Their use in the strike showed managements’ complete disdain for their workers and desire to replace them like any other obsolete tool. The very sight of the Pinkerton uniform was enough to throw some watchers into a state of intense anger.

The Pinkerton Detective Agency became infamous among the working class because of its role in breaking numerous strikes and infiltrating labor organizations as spies. In the twenty years leading up to 1892, the Pinkertons had played a role in defeating at least seventy strikes.<sup>35</sup> The working class viewed the Pinkertons as shock troops of management, who existed solely to protect the interests of the rich; if the strikers at Homestead were the Knights of Labor, the Pinkertons were the Knights of Capitalism. The appearance of the Pinkertons on the Monongahela only served to increase the strikers’ fear and anger. Their appearance meant they were either going to violently suppress the strike or protect the importation of replacement workers; in either case, the very sight of the Pinkerton uniform meant the strikers’ cause was coming under direct attack by armed guards famous for their anti-labor tactics.

Blaming the violence at Homestead solely, or even mostly, on the strikes completely ignores the Pinkertons’ effect on the situation and their history as a catalyst for labor violence. The Pinkertons’ were so famous for the trouble which followed their

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<sup>34</sup> “Looks Like War”, June 28, 1892. *The Pittsburgh Post*, reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”: Homestead 1892*, 135

<sup>35</sup> Frank Morn, *“The Eye that Never Sleeps”: A History of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 106

involvement in labor disputes that numerous states had passed laws forbidding or limiting their ability to operate within their boundaries. Prior to 1892, Montana, Wyoming, Missouri, New Mexico, Minnesota, Washington, Kentucky, New York and Massachusetts all had laws which either completely banned the detectives or limited their powers. Their involvement in the Homestead Strike, even though none of them faced any criminal charges, cast further suspicion on them; numerous other states, including Pennsylvania, passed anti-Pinkerton legislation following the 1892 violence.<sup>36</sup> The Pinkertons' involvement was a known source of trouble, and it is not at all surprising that their appearance at Homestead precipitated a gunfight. Hiring the Pinkertons showed the Carnegie Company's desire to crush the strikers by any means necessary; even if that meant setting events into motion, which would, and did, lead to violence.

By employing the Pinkerton Detective Agency, Henry Frick, and, indirectly, Andrew Carnegie, who apparently knew and approved of this strategy, forced the issue in the divide with the workers, in hopes of insuring a direct confrontation between strikers and guards. Even while he was negotiating halfheartedly with his workers, Frick contacted the Pinkerton Agency about the impending lockout and strike. Henry Frick wanted to force a violent confrontation because this would allow him to press for the government involvement, which would then find itself forced to protect the company's interests since they were not breaking any laws. The strikers, however, would seem to be a violent threat to social stability, and the government would have felt the need to control them.

Implicit in the Carnegie Company's building defenses around the mill, leading to the works being named 'Fort Frick', was a challenge to the strikers. The Carnegie

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 107

Company made it clear they did not intend to give in to the strikers' demands or attempt to negotiate further; by constructing fortifications around the mill the Carnegie Company showed they were finished dealing with the Homestead workers. The fence forced the strikers to realize that they were having their mill, the product of their hard work, taken from them. Additionally, management took an overtly aggressive stance towards the strikers by fortifying the mill. The fortifications around the mill included a three-mile fence around all the works with barbed wire across the top, stations for sharpshooters to look out, and twelve-foot platforms with searchlights on top. In addition, since the mill buildings were on either side of the river, the company constructed a bridge allowing passage between the various offices without having to venture outside the fortifications.<sup>37</sup> These fortifications were built in advance of the actual lockout, clearly conveying the company's lack of commitment to peaceful negotiations. The mill was prepared for a battle; its fortifying acted, essentially, as a declaration of war against any potential strikers. Given the company's bellicose attitude there could be little surprise at the strikers' military preparedness.

The violence at Homestead was more severe than it might have been because the Pinkertons on the barges were not properly trained, and lacked, for the most part, sufficient knowledge of the situation at the mill when they landed. 'Temporary guards' made up a significant part of the Pinkertons' force; these men were hired on a job-to-job basis, allowing the agency to quickly and easily swell their forces. Of the 300 Pinkertons at Homestead probably only 25 to 30 were 'regular' agents. Most of the guards were hired temporarily and boarded the boats to Homestead with no knowledge of what they

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<sup>37</sup> Arthur Gordon Burgoyne. The Homestead Strike of 1892, 22

were hired to do.<sup>38</sup> Hiring men with little or no training and experience for a potentially dangerous mission was a flaw in the Pinkertons' organization. When these men were threatened by the strikers and came under fire they had no idea what to do, and their panic probably made the situation worse.

Most of the Pinkertons had no idea what they had been hired to do or where they were going. John T. McCurry, one of the non-regular detectives, recalled being hired but told he was not at liberty to know where they were going, and that he just needed to be at a barge on a certain day. Through talking with other guards on the barge, he discovered no one was sure where they were going, although there were some rumors they were going to work on a dam at Beaver.<sup>39</sup> The majority of the Pinkertons did not know they were entering the midst of a labor strike and would encounter working class men and women who hated them simply because of what the Pinkerton uniforms represented to them. These detectives were more disposed to panic or hesitate in dangerous situations because they had no idea what was going on. In addition, these untrained men, ignorant of the situation, received firearms halfway to Homestead. Under these conditions 300 armed men could only have escalated the violence. The conditions surrounding the Pinkertons' mission seemed doomed to failure, the only certainty being it's potential to increase the violence at Homestead.

Henry Frick, in addition to using the Pinkertons because they would certainly drive the strikers away or to violence, realized that the local authorities in charge of Homestead were ineffective in dealing with the strike. The Homestead mayor was one of the strikers, and Allegheny County Sheriff William H. McCleary appeared incapable and

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<sup>38</sup> Frank Morn, *The Eye that Never Sleep*, 154-155

<sup>39</sup> Original Homestead Strike Materials: Coroner's Inquest Papers and Minute Book Entries From Various Unions, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh), pg. 12,

unwilling to reason with the strikers. In 1889, McCleary had been leading the deputies who had been turned away by the picketing strikers, and during the 1892 strike he avoided any confrontations and decisions. Much of the strike's violence can be, at least partially, attributed to his poor handling of the situation.

Sherriff McCleary did not try to reconcile the strikers with the company, preferring to let the management sort the problem out in their own fashion. While he was informed of the company's decision to hire Pinkerton guards, he neglected to inform the strikers, who if warned, might have been able to control their emotions and not resort to violence. Also, he did nothing to reason with the company about their decision, despite the fact that he must have seen the bloody potential in the meeting of strikers and Pinkertons, and his job involved keeping the peace. There is no guarantee the sheriff could have completely stopped the violence, and it did not seem logical that he could have; however, his lack of action definitely contributed to the problem and made it necessary for the state militia to become involved in order to restore the peace.

The 1892 Homestead Strike shocked America with its intense bloodshed; it was one of the country's most violent labor disputes ever. Many sources contributed to this violence to the strikers' actions, which were described as radical and mob-like. This was partially true: for the period of the battle on the river bank, the strikers were acting predominantly on anger and fear; they did not approach the situation peacefully or orderly. Despite this fact, the strikers, for most of the strike, were controlled and attempted to minimize their aggressiveness and radicalism. The violence at Homestead can be placed, predominantly, at the door of the Carnegie Company for their strategy designed to incite violence and the government forces that let events spiral out of control.



## **Part 4. Andrew Carnegie, Politics, and Paternalism in the 1892 Homestead Strike**

Violence and work stoppages during the 1892 Homestead strike remained mostly isolated to the town of Homestead; some other Carnegie mills struck in sympathy, but mostly other unions expressed their support for the strike through donations or statements released to the press.<sup>40</sup> Still, the strike had political and social implications far beyond Homestead's borders. Andrew Carnegie, as America's most prominent industrialist, helped garner the strike national and even global attention. Since the strike was a disagreement between Carnegie and his employees, it set the standard for management/labor relations throughout the steel industry, if not American industry as a whole.

### **Part 4.1 Andrew Carnegie's Attitude towards Labor and Philanthropy**

Although Carnegie received massive criticism for his involvement in the affair, throughout his life he was enigmatic in his approach to labor. He often made comments about the sanctity of labor, drastically conflicting with his aggressive stance towards unions. Carnegie believed he, as the self-made industrial giant, should dictate exactly how his mills ran. A firm believer in Social Darwinism, Carnegie ran his company according to the theory's principles. Social Darwinism was the application of Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest to society. Using this theory, Carnegie attached a process of natural selection to laws of competition. Rationalizing the harsh economic realities of societal progress, he wrote,

“It [the law of competition] is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may sometimes be hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it ensures the survival of the fittest in every department.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Minute Book Entries From Various Unions, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA, all entries

<sup>41</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 45-46

Carnegie believed societal improvement was possible through capitalism, but it involved the regrettable sacrifice of a segment of the population. He was the pinnacle of the steel industry any decision he made to improve it, like increasing output or dropping prices, was justified despite labor's sufferings. The group's well-being outweighed the minority's hardships. His intent was not malicious, but unfortunately, Social Darwinism was generally harmful because it involved, with rare exceptions, the working class's marginalization for the benefit of those above them.

The Homestead strike also had a variety of political implications on both the state and national level. During a period in which America was already experiencing high social tensions, the Homestead strike forced the government to decide whose concerns were more valid: those of private industry or working class citizens. Fear of social upheaval stemming from friction between classes made government officials quick to stamp out any signs, or even vague hints, of radical thinking in Homestead. The government would have been wary of a strike spreading in the steel industry because a slow down in steel production limited American industrialization and expansion, and put it at a disadvantage on the world stage. In addition to elevating fears of social uprisings and halts to American expansion, the strike influenced already brewing anti-republican sentiment, helping block republican incumbent Benjamin Harrison in the presidential race.

Andrew Carnegie presents a confusing figure because of his aggressive actions towards labor compared to his generous philanthropy. If you type 'Carnegie' into a Google search you will receive a list of websites advertising the Carnegie Corporation,

information about Andrew Carnegie's fame as one of America's greatest industrialists, and websites for various cultural institutions, like theaters or libraries bearing his name. The Carnegie Corporation website states their major goals for 2005-2006 were education, International Peace and Security, International Development, and Strengthening U.S. Democracy. In addition, the top of the website bears a quote from Carnegie about the importance of education in society, saying, "Only in popular education can man erect the structure of an enduring civilization."<sup>42</sup> Using the great steelmaker's words, the Carnegie Corporation proudly trumpets their dedication to public education and social progress. Numerous socially progressive institutions, such as National Public Radio, owe their continued existence to grants from the Carnegie Corporation. Andrew Carnegie's name now goes hand in hand with philanthropy and efforts to improve American society for all people.

During his lifetime, Carnegie tended to support liberal causes and liked to think of himself as radical thinker; he defended American republicanism and Irish Home Rule, was an outspoken critic of the British Monarchy and aristocracy; in 1898 he engaged in a public feud with President McKinley over American Imperialism in the Philippines and Cuba.<sup>43</sup> He believed American blood was being spent needlessly, in service of a cause which would rob these peoples of their natural rights. Carnegie spoke against violence in the Philippines and Cuba, declaring it bad for American democracy, but, as Secretary of State John Hay put it, he did not bother to "reflect that the Government is in a somewhat robust condition even after shooting down several citizens in his interests at

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<sup>42</sup>The Carnegie Corporation of New York. <http://www.carnegie.org/>

<sup>43</sup> David Nasaw, Andrew Carnegie, 547,

Homestead”.<sup>44</sup> Carnegie’s stance on American foreign affairs stood in stark contrast with his willingness to employ violence in Homestead against American workers. The 1892 Homestead Strike presented a different, darker, and greedier picture of Andrew Carnegie.

Andrew Carnegie’s Social Darwinism informed many of his opinions concerning social order. He believed his own success in becoming one of America’s richest, most influential industrialists provided a legitimizing example of Social Darwinism’s truth. As such, he thought every man must work towards improving himself, not be content to rely on being handed advantages. Carnegie was not intentionally unsympathetic or lacking in desire to help those less fortunate than he. Quite the opposite, in 1889 Carnegie wrote *The Gospel of Wealth*, outlining the philanthropic responsibilities of the new upper class of self-made men.<sup>45</sup> Carnegie stated that the rich man’s obligation was to help the lower classes. He wanted the wealthy to give people of lesser means tools for improving themselves. It is important to note, Carnegie would not have supported welfare programs; he thought programs which attempted to hand people everything were damaging because they did not allow or encourage self-improvement. Unions, based on this reasoning, were a detriment to their members and a drain on industry as a whole; in Carnegie’s opinion, unions hindered industrial growth by putting restrictions on what companies could do in their mills. They provided, in Carnegie’s mind, a harmful crutch, which if the laboring classes leaned on, would rob them of initiative and will-power.

Carnegie’s dismissal of union’s as damaging to the worker was flawed reasoning. Without the union the number of workers required by the company decreased, thus making people fight for positions, driving down wages, and relegating the worker to the

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<sup>44</sup> William Thayer. John Hay to Whitelaw Reid in David Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie*, 552

<sup>45</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 71

status of a disposable resource. Carnegie claimed this was not the case because workers would not fight each other for positions. In an article about changes necessary in labor organization he wrote, “There is an unwritten law among the best workmen: ‘Thou shalt not take thy neighbor’s job,’”<sup>46</sup> attempting to prove that a company could not force workers to struggle against their fellows in an attempt to drive down wages. In making this claim Carnegie showed he did not possess a full understanding of conditions among the working classes; instead, he believed in an idealized vision of the brotherhood among workers, which took precedence over basic survival. Additionally, Carnegie claimed he would never hire replacement workers during a work stoppage because “the class of men that can be induced to take the place of other men who have stopped work” were not trustworthy or good workers. In spite of his professed loyalty to the working class, Carnegie did not negotiate with his striking workers. Instead, he tried breaking the strike using replacement workers, even though he had earlier spoken about the flaws inherent in a worker who would take another’s job.

In a speech at Braddock titled *Address to the Workingmen*, Carnegie described how unions furthered divisions between capital and labor. According to Carnegie, capital and labor were once aligned in their interests, both profiting when the industry profited and suffering during slow periods; unions destroyed this shared fortune, thus harming labor, Carnegie claimed, stating, “He is an enemy of Labor who seeks to array Labor against Capital”.<sup>47</sup> In Carnegie’s eyes, a union made the workers needlessly hostile to the company, preventing the formation of any common bonds, and slowed down industry

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<sup>46</sup> Andrew Carnegie, “Results of the Labor Struggle”, *The Forum* in David P. Demarest. and Fannia Weingartner eds. “*The River Ran Red*”: *Homestead 1892*, 3

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Carnegie, “Address to Workingmen” in David P. Demarest. and Fannia Weingartner eds. “*The River Ran Red*”: *Homestead 1892*, 1

progress. Carnegie made these remarks at Braddock because it housed the Edgar Thomson Steel Works, a model of what Carnegie wanted in all his mills; the Braddock Mill was the first to use the Bessemer process in America, thus putting it at the forefront of mechanization; at this point in time the Edgar Thomson Mill was closed to union organizations.

Carnegie's speech at Braddock served as a precursor to the trouble at Homestead; in many ways, the Edgar Thomson Works mirrored, although less violently, the events at Homestead. The Thomson Works was an example of the rising tide of mechanization in the steel industry. Unfortunately for the Braddock workers, this also meant fewer jobs and lower pay. It did, however, produce large amounts of steel at a lower cost; a benefit which Carnegie felt outweighed the decrease in jobs.

In 1888, Carnegie, in conjunction with Henry Frick, his new partner, drove the Amalgamated Association from the Braddock mill and instituted two twelve-hour shifts in place of the previous three eight-hour shifts. Although this was harder on the men and allowed for fewer employees, it allowed the company to use their machinery more, lowering the production cost of steel, and raising profits.

Carnegie and other industrialists eagerly installed the newest machinery in their plants and mills, and although this machinery meant layoffs and decreases in pay, management viewed it as positive step because it meant progress. At Homestead, the Amalgamated Association and the strikers drew Carnegie's wrath because they demanded a certain number of employees, blocking full utilization of the new machinery. As one Carnegie official said, "The Amalgamated Association placed a tax on

improvements; therefore the Amalgamated had to go.”<sup>48</sup> Although locking out workers and breaking a strike seemed hostile and uncaring on his part, Carnegie rationalized his actions using his theory of progress; despite the workers he planned on firing, he was improving American industry as a whole, and, by providing more steel, helping America’s growth.

In 1892, the Homestead Steel works was the most technologically advanced mill in Carnegie’s vast empire, but it was also the stronghold of the Amalgamated Association in the steel industry. The union prevented Carnegie from using Homestead’s machinery to its full potential, and the destruction of the union became a way in which Carnegie could send a sign to the rest of the industry that progress, not unions, ruled in his mills.

Part of Carnegie’s plan to improve society and the working classes’ lot was through the erecting of public buildings like hospitals, libraries, and theaters. His 1889 speech in Braddock was in a dedication of the Library he built for the town. In essence, the mill workers lost a union and gained a library. This trade made perfect sense based on Social Darwinism; the union was a hindrance to working class and industrial improvement, but the library provided an opportunity for workers to educate themselves, and through education, improve their lot in life. The library had no classical literature, containing mostly technical manuals. Carnegie and other Social Darwinists believed classical education was worthless for the working classes. Instead, he provided them with a technical education, hoping it would make them better factory and mill workers, so improving the steel industry. A small problem with Carnegie’s belief that workers’ benefited from libraries was that since he introduced the twelve hour shifts his workers

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<sup>48</sup> Hogg, “Homestead Strike” in David Brody. *Steelworkers in America*, 54

had no time to read. In opposition to Carnegie's hope, the unemployed workers who had formerly worked for Carnegie had plenty of time to read, not that it did them any good.

Education and hard work did elevate some workers' statuses, validating, at least somewhat, Carnegie's belief in Social Darwinism. Carnegie was always on the lookout for intelligent and hard working workers in his mills and tried filling as many management positions as possible with former steel workers. This proved a smart move on his part. These workers knew the industry, often got along well with the workers, and felt indebted to Carnegie for their promotions. Carnegie's actions could not completely fulfill his social theories. There were not enough management positions to go around, and the majority of common steelworkers were destined to toil in their menial positions.

Carnegie's theories about Social Darwinism were so important in his business dealings because he attributed his own rise to prominence to hard work and the rhetoric of the self-made man. Carnegie was fond of talking about his rise from nothing to wealth and power; his autobiography served as a written tribute to this process of self-construction.<sup>49</sup> Ironically, Carnegie's father was a skilled garment manufacturer who was forced to leave Scotland because a factory put him out of business. Although Andrew Carnegie did not immigrate to America with much, it was not quite accurate to say he started with nothing. His position in life had been better than many of his workers' positions at Homestead. Carnegie's rags-to-riches legacy made him appear closer with the working classes, and after telling the story for so many years, Carnegie came to believe it as absolute truth. Carnegie, convinced of his working class background, felt he had a right to make decisions affecting his workers' lives; he believed that he, more than

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<sup>49</sup> James V. Catano. *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and the Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man*, (Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 59

other industrialist who inherited their fortunes, had labor's best interests at heart. Many of Carnegie's theories of society were validated by his own accounting of his own life.

In his speech at Braddock, Carnegie tried healing the rifts between the Edgar Thomson's workers, disgruntled at losing their union, and the company's management. In addition, as this speech took place three years before the 1892 Homestead Strike and during a time of labor unrest at Homestead, it also served as a warning to Homestead's workers that Carnegie wanted changes made at their mill too. In his speech Carnegie ominously declared it was about time he "do something for Homestead". He also stated that the Homestead men were not good workers like the Edgar Thomson men because the "Amalgamated Association has [had] for years compelled us to pay one-third more", and "our men there are not partners".<sup>50</sup> Carnegie accused the Homestead workers and the Amalgamated Association of blocking progress by demanding higher wages and refusing to cooperate with management's plans for improving the mill. By referencing Homestead in the Braddock speech he foreshadowed the company's fight to drive the Amalgamated Association out, just as at Edgar Thomson.

Given the violence at Homestead and the cold-hearted nature of many of Carnegie's theories about labor, it would be possible to have seen him as simply a heartless industrialist. Despite his dire threats, Andrew Carnegie could not bring himself to antagonize his workers, at least not without using an intermediary. His partnership with Henry Frick sent a clear signal that he intended to deal harshly with the Amalgamated Association, and any other labor organizations. Frick was famous for his union-busting in the coke industry and brought with him an edge which Carnegie lacked.

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew Carnegie, "Address to Workingmen" in David P. Demarest. and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, 2

Frick was generally regarded as the most relentless foes of organized labor within the industry.<sup>51</sup> His position as a partner in the Carnegie Company meant he was there to do the things which Carnegie felt would have reflected badly on his own image. Carnegie enjoyed playing the part of the worker's friend far too much to be able to go in direct opposition to them. During the Homestead Strike, Carnegie made sure he was in Scotland, so it was Frick who would receive the majority of the bad press. Still, Frick was not operating on his own; quite the opposite, Carnegie and Frick worked out the plan for ridding Homestead of its union before Carnegie left for Scotland.

The Homestead Strike was probably very trying for Andrew Carnegie; his desire for his workers' friendship must have continually warred with his belief that the ultimate good was to be found in increasing production and industry. In his writings and speeches Carnegie frequently referenced workers' rights and the obligations of a businessman, so his reason for going to Scotland was, at least partially, so he could not be interviewed by the American press and make a comment harmful to the company's handling of the strike. Ironically, around the time of the strike Carnegie was dedicating a hospital in Scotland, furthering his charitable reputation.

#### **4.2 Government's Assumptions about Labor and Involvement at Homestead**

The Homestead Strike forced the government to make a decision about the society's proper order by upholding either management's or labor's wishes. Carnegie, usually a staunch supporter of an unregulated approach to industry, welcomed government's use of the militia to move the strikers out of the mill and protect the company as it hired replacement workers. In his desire to destroy the Amalgamated Association at Homestead, Carnegie went directly against his principles and helped

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<sup>51</sup> Wall, Joseph Frazier. *Andrew Carnegie*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 345

initiate a change in government policy; following the violence at Homestead, state and federal governments became quicker and more likely to intervene in labor disputes, even though they were squabbles involving private industry. Pennsylvania's Governor Pattison had his hand forced during the Homestead strike; fears of a public uprising necessitating mobilizing the state militia as proof the government could still control its citizens.

Besides its violence, the Homestead strike held the federal government's interest because the Homestead works had been involved in the manufacture of steel plates for America's new armored navy. Although he was a professed pacifist, Carnegie had taken the naval contract of the construction of armor plates. So, the federal government had a vested interest in seeing the strike halted and labor conflicts resolved as soon as possible. On July 5<sup>th</sup> *The Pittsburg Dispatch* ran a story entitled "Can't Build Men-of-War", reporting worries in Washington about delays in delivering armor plates caused by the strike. According to Naval officials the delay was not expected to be too long, except in the case of an extended work stoppage.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, this was exactly what happened. The Naval Department saw the delay steadily grow as strikers fought Pinkertons and the mill remained closed. Although the Naval Department had contingency plans in place which called for other mills to roll the armor plates, their obvious concern with the Homestead strike would have drawn other federal government interest.

The Pennsylvania state government became involved in the strike after the battle; initially, the governor had been reluctant to interfere, preferring the matter be worked out by local officials and the parties involved. The violence forced Governor Pattison's hand

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<sup>52</sup> "Can't Build Men-of-War". July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1892, *The Pittsburg Post* reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, 130

as it became clear that the local authorities could not keep the peace. In the government's eyes the major problem was the potential spread of violence. The militia quickly moved to establish their supremacy in Homestead, reacting coldly to overtures from the strikers. At his first meeting with Homestead's Advisory Committee, General Snowden made it clear he intended to control events completely, stating, "I don't want any brass business while I'm here, I want you to distinctly understand that I am master of this situation."<sup>53</sup> The government so feared any sort of social upheaval that it came down harder on the strikers because they were the force fighting for change in the steel industry, and in industrial American society as a whole.

The government reacted harshly to the strikers also because they feared the spread of social unrest among the working classes. Following the deployment of the state militia to Homestead, questions about their loyalty when faced with arresting and controlling fellow workingmen appeared in the *New York Herald*. In an article entitled, "Will They Obey Orders?", the author wondered whether the militia, being composed almost entirely of workingmen, would be willing to do what was asked of them in putting down the strike.<sup>54</sup> From the government's perspective the possible spread of social violence because of the strike presented the greatest danger to America. While government officials might have been wary about the goals and methods the Carnegie Company used, their continued existence did not present a threat, but rather benefited American power and stability in the world.

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<sup>53</sup> "Gen. Snowden Means Business". July 13, 1892, *The New York Times* reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *The River Ran Red: Homestead 1892*, 135

<sup>54</sup> "Will They Obey Orders: The Pittsburgh Militia Composed Almost Entirely of Workingmen", July 11, 1892, *The New York Herald* reprinted in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *The River Ran Red: Homestead 1892*, 130

Berkman's attempted assassination of Henry Frick could only have confirmed governmental fears about the strike's damaging social impact. They feared the strikers, if left to their own devices, would provide a rallying point for anarchists and encourage other radicals into taking action. Fears about social conflicts spreading caused the militia to react harshly to anyone who could spread working class angers and complaints. For example, after a militia man named Private W.L. Iams cheered Berkman's attempted assassination of Frick, he was brutally punished by being hung from his thumbs and then dishonorably dismissed from the ranks.<sup>55</sup> Incidents like this were quickly punished because they seemed to be government fears of social uprising coming true. Using the same rationale, the leaders of the strikers were arrested, but the Pinkertons were never charged or arrested for any of the deaths during the strike.

Andrew Carnegie spent the remainder of his life trying to recover from the stain to his image the Homestead Strike left. He attempted giving away his entire fortune before he died, but when it became clear he was unable to do that, he set up the Carnegie Corporation in order to continue his philanthropic efforts. Carnegie's attitude towards the Amalgamated Association and the Homestead Strikers stood in stark contrast to many ideas of liberalism and democracy which he held dear. The stance which he took resulted from a fundamental difference in what type of industrial organization best served America's interest. The conflict at Homestead was the result of a clash between two different theories of social organization; in one the people reigned supreme, and in the other, American's prominent and wealthiest citizens held the responsibility for guiding the country as they saw best.

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<sup>55</sup> July 25, "A Guardsmen's Treason", *The Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* in David P. Demarest and Fannia Weingartner eds. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892*, 174



## Part 5. Conclusion

In 1898 Andrew Carnegie built a library in Homestead, and in his dedication speech tried to put the 1892 strike's violence to rest, declaring:

“The memories which Homestead has called up to this time have sometimes saddened us, and we hope that this occasion might fill our minds with such a beautiful picture as to enable us to banish the cruel memories of the past forever.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite all of Carnegie's remorse, his reputation never fully recovered; no matter how many libraries he donated or workers' pension funds he started, his legacy is forever bound to the bloody Homestead Strike of 1892. After winning in 1892 but receiving massive amounts of public criticism, Carnegie attempted to repair his relationship with labor. He never wanted a bad relationship with his workers; quite the opposite, he wanted his workers' admiration and respect. The problem was that Carnegie always thought about the larger industrial picture and believed any mistreatment of labor was justified by industrial success. He thought the ends justified the means in steel production; in his mind, providing workers with pension plans rationalized their former exploitation. Unfortunately, Homestead never forgot or recovered from the strike, and today it is a hollow shell; the remains of the mill are still there but few jobs remain and little comes out of the city.

1892 was a period of time when immigrants rose to prominence in America. Ellis Island opened its doors for the first time during this year and James Naismith, as Scottish immigrant, invented the game of basketball, which has since become inexorably entwined with American culture. Also a Scottish immigrant, Andrew Carnegie became infamous for his involvement in the Homestead Strike. The Homestead Strike also

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<sup>56</sup> Library File, The Carnegie Library of Homestead, November 5, 1898, excerpted in David P. Demarest. and Fannia Weingartner eds. *“The River Ran Red”: Homestead 1892*, 1

involved a large number of recent Southern and Eastern European immigrants who formed a common cause with American workers against the company. This signaled a change in relationships within the working class, a movement towards a more unified form, less divided by ethnic and cultural boundaries. By taking part in the strike these recent immigrants showed they had a stake in American society and should no longer be considered foreigners; striking was one way in which immigrants claimed a part in the American Republic. Did the defeat at Homestead discourage these immigrants? Or did the common suffering of the working class make them feel more connected with society? I think the Homestead strike, rather than discourage immigrants, strengthened bonds between ethnic groups, who found they possessed a common class identity.

Violence played a major role in the Homestead Strike; in fact, it is what set it apart from other strikes of the time. Many reporters and union officials claimed foreign anarchists initiated the violence at Homestead. Some of these claims were based on fears linking anarchists, foreigners, and labor organizations. The union officials tried blaming the violence on foreign radicals because they wanted to save their union. Despite these claims, it was impossible to find any hint of foreign anarchists influencing the strike. The violence was spontaneous, not carefully organized, and was not the result of few rabble-rousers among the strikers. Instead, violence resulted from working class frustrations and the belief that all they had worked for was being snatched from them illegally. The strikers fought to protect their jobs, and, in their minds, Homestead's proper social order.

Ultimately, it was the striker's violence which brought the government in on the company's side and doomed the strike to failure. However, the temporary success of the strike in controlling and protecting the mill influenced future labor organizations to adopt

more militant, aggressive tactics. Despite the Amalgamated Associations' fall as a result of this strike, the stage appeared set for future unions, organizing both skilled and unskilled workers, to enter onto America's industrial stage.

This strike involved a disagreement between workers and management about the proper social order; the workers maintained their right to work at the mill, despite the Carnegie Company's claim that their private ownership of the mill allowed them to hire and fire whomever they wished. This disagreement required government intervention in order to settle what form society should take. In this case, the government sided with private industry and allowed the company to dispose of their workers in any manner they wished to. The Homestead strike ushered in a period of increased government involvement, however the government remained mostly on management's side, protecting the interests of big business. It would be around forty years before another steel union wielded significant power in the United States.<sup>57</sup> Today, unions appear to be on the decline, with companies like Wal-Mart refusing to even allow them to form.

Are relations between labor and management really all that different now than they were in 1892? Carnegie attempted to force the union out of Homestead by shutting the mill down and locking out the employees until they became desperate enough to return under his terms. This is not very different from the behavior of large Aerospace companies in Wichita, Kansas, who threatened to move their factories overseas unless the town gave them exactly what they wanted. Will America see another bloody strike like Homestead? There appear to be growing divides between the interest of business leaders and labor, as the gap between rich and poor widens in America.

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<sup>57</sup> Sean Dennis Cashman, *American in the Gilded Age*, 166

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This book talked about the different theories of democracy which developed during the tumultuous 19<sup>th</sup> century. This book discusses how industrialists emphasized the value of the individual within the Republic, while the mass of the working class preferred to think of the Republic's power stemming from the group. This is an important question which has to be discussed when thinking about the Homestead Strike.

#### Primary Sources

1. Original Homestead Strike Materials: Coroner's Inquest Papers and Minute Book Entries From Various Unions, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA

A useful resource, containing the record of the dead and an interview with two surviving Pinkerton guards. The interview deals with the detectives initial contact with the agency up through his capture and release by the strikers. Perfectly illustrates the confusion existing among the Pinkerton forces. The one drawback is that it does not contain any interviews with the strikers, their voice is completely absent.

These papers also have the book entries from various other union meetings around Pittsburgh. These entries show how these unions reacted to the Homestead Strike. Usually, the donated money or issued a statement of support, however, the general reaction does not seem overly radical.

2. Carnegie, Andrew. Autobiography, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1933

Carnegie's Autobiography was not very useful. It was hard to tell what was factual and what Carnegie had made up. Still, this confusion told a lot about Carnegie's invention of his own myth and his desire to be well-liked by everyone.

3. Demarest, David P. and Fannia Weingartner eds. "The River Ran Red":

Homestead 1892, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992

By far the most useful primary source I have. This volume contains most of the information on the strike which the University of Pittsburgh possesses. It collects newspaper articles, political cartoons, essays, speeches, letters, and senate reports on the Homestead Strike. These are all organized according to the date; it follows the strike before, during, and after the

violence. This is the one primary source which contains both Pinkerton and Striker interviews.

4. Burgoyne, Arthur Gordon. The Homestead Strike of 1892, Pittsburgh:

University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979

A newspaper reporter's account of the Homestead Strike. Burgoyne actually went to Homestead to interview people and collect information. He is able to provide first-hand accounts of the strike, although he has a tendency to editorialize and possesses a bias towards labor. Does a good job of following the strike beyond its official end, talks about senate investigations, and union leaders' trials.

5. Fink, Leon, ed., Major Problems in the Gilded Age and in the Progressive

Era, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001

An account of the Homestead strike given by John H. Holway, a Pinkerton detective. Not an incredibly useful document because the Pinkerton viewpoint was the easiest to find. However, provides evidence of the confusion prevalent among the Pinkerton forces. This wasn't all that useful since more detailed, longer accounts exist in other sources.

6. Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth" in Life in the Iron-Mills, edited by Cecelia Tichi. New York: Vanderbilt University, 1998

An excerpt from Carnegie's Gospel of Wealth. This illustrates Carnegie's somewhat contradictory theory of industrial progress and philanthropy. Provided some direct evidence to show Carnegie believed his philanthropic efforts later in his life would make up for the suffering which his workers endured while building his fortune.

7. The Carnegie Corporation of New York. <http://www.carnegie.org/>

The main page for The Carnegie Corporation. This provides the philanthropic legacy of Andrew Carnegie, an amazing comparison to most of what was written about him during the Homestead Strike. The Carnegie Corporation is how Andrew Carnegie wished to be remembered, and because of its work, probably how he is usually remembered, at least outside of Homestead.

