



Handout 3 - American Labor and Working-Class History, 1886-1944

1880s-1890s	1900s	1910s
<p><u>1886</u>: Industrial workers rally in Chicago’s Haymarket Square to protest dangerous working conditions. During the rally, someone throws a bomb at police officers, who respond by opening fire on the crowd. Known as the Haymarket Riot, the protest divided Americans: some saw the striking workers as oppressed, others as agitators.</p> <p><u>1886</u>: The American Federation of Labor (AFL) forms from a loose organization of craft unions, with the goal of representing skilled laborers.</p> <p><u>1890</u>: The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) forms.</p> <p><u>1894</u>: Factory workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company in Chicago go on strike after their wages are cut and activists in the company are fired. The American Railway Union, led by Eugene V. Debs, supports the strike by announcing its members would no longer work on trains that had Pullman cars. The strikers get increasingly violent, and the Railroad industry is crippled, driving President Grover Cleveland to send in troops, who fired upon rioting railway workers. After the Pullman Strike, a series of laws are enacted that privilege the rights of employers over laborers.</p>	<p><u>1901</u>: With a platform of representing workers, the Socialist Party of America (SP) forms and grows in popularity, reaching over three thousand local branches and 42 states.</p> <p><u>1902</u>: After having their demands ignored, miners in Pennsylvania go on strike, initiating a national coal crisis. President Theodore Roosevelt intervenes, and 5 months later the strike is resolved, with miners receiving a better salary and a shorter workday. After the 1902 Coal Strike, the president develops his “Square Deal” policy, which emphasizes the government’s role in mediating between industry and labor so both are treated fairly.</p> <p><u>1904</u>: The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is founded through the efforts of Eugene V. Debs. Its members, known as “The Wobblies,” fought for a union that represents all workers, regardless of race or gender. The formation of the IWW upset company owners as well as more conservative unions such as the AFL.</p> <p><u>1905</u>: In <i>Lochner v. New York</i>, the Supreme Court overrules a New York law that set maximum work hours for bakers.</p> <p><u>1908</u>: Seeing them as the “weaker” sex, <i>Muller v. Oregon</i> allowed laws limiting the amount of hours women could work.</p>	<p><u>1911</u>: In New York City, The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire kills 146 garment workers, mostly women. Afterwards, immigrant Clara Lemlich surprises union leaders by initiating a strike of around 20,000 garment workers. The striker’s demands for higher pay, shorter working hours, and better working conditions were eventually met.</p> <p><u>1914</u>: The Colorado National Guard fires upon a striking miner camp in Ludlow, killing eleven children and two women. As news of the Ludlow Massacre spread, miners took up arms against the mining companies, while many criticized mine owner John D. Rockefeller, Jr. President Woodrow Wilson sent in federal troops to end the strike. The miner’s demands were not met.</p> <p><u>1914</u>: The Clayton Anti-Trust Act excludes labor unions from commercial regulation, making it easier to pursue peaceful strikes and boycotts.</p> <p><u>1914-1918</u>: During World War I, Th Woodrow Wilson administration plays a more hands-on role with industry to avoid strikes during the wartime economy, giving unions more political power.</p> <p><u>1915-1918</u>: The Great Migration begins as African Americans in the South move to the North for better employment.</p>



1920s	1930s	1940s
<p><u>1919-1929</u>: A booming post-war economy creates The Roaring Twenties, a period of relative prosperity for employers and workers alike. New consumer goods and a faith in persistent economic growth leads to a large credit economy, precipitating the stock market crash that would occur at the end of the decade.</p> <p><u>1919</u>: Henry Ford's Assembly Line automates the production of automobiles, making cars more affordable to average Americans, but also threatening the jobs of auto plant workers.</p> <p><u>1919-1921</u>: Union membership falls due to pro-business policies enacted under the presidencies of Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge. While over 4 million workers strike in this period, few had their demands met. The policies of Harding and Coolidge lead the 1920s to become known as "The Business Decade."</p> <p><u>1926</u>: The Railway Labor Act requires Railway companies to enter into collective bargaining agreements with unions, and outlaws hiring discrimination against union members.</p> <p><u>1929</u>: On October 24, "Black Tuesday," The New York Stock Exchange crashes, leading to the failure of around 5 thousand banks from 1929-1933. The Great Depression begins, effecting every social class.</p>	<p><u>1929-1933</u>: Shantytowns called "Hoovervilles" for the poor and unemployed are erected throughout the country.</p> <p><u>1932</u>: A group of 22,000 World War I veterans create a Hooverville within sight of the Capitol to demand the government pay them the bonuses promised for their service. The Hoover administration responds by sending US soldiers and tanks to destroy the camp. Public support for President Herbert Hoover falls, and he loses the presidential election to Franklin D. Roosevelt.</p> <p><u>1933</u>: Roosevelt signs the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), creating a framework in which the government, businesses, and workers cooperate in a difficult economy. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) is created to oversee the process.</p> <p><u>1934</u>: The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) forms as a conglomeration of mining and garment working unions.</p> <p><u>1935</u>: The National Labor Relations Act is passed, protecting worker's rights to collective bargaining. The act was a cornerstone to Roosevelt's New Deal platform, which also included the establishment of Social Security and relief to poor families.</p>	<p><u>1941</u>: As America enters World War II after the Attack on Pearl Harbor, manufacturing surges, effectively ending the great depression. Labor leaders gain political power by promising not to initiate strikes during the war.</p> <p><u>1941-1945</u>: While men are at war, women enter the workforce in record numbers. While women were asked to return to the home after the war, their experiences working and earning a wage, perhaps best expressed by the "Rosie the Riveter" image, helps form the modern feminist movement.</p> <p><u>1942</u>: In need of labor, the federal government creates the Bracero Program, a guest worker program that brought close to 5 million agricultural laborers from Mexico.</p> <p><u>1944</u>: The G.I. Bill is signed into law, providing a variety of economic and educational benefits to veterans. An economic boom after the war led to higher wages, greater job security, and an improved standard of living to many Americans.</p> <p><u>1947</u>: The Taft-Hartley Act, which weakened the power of unions, overcame a veto by President Harry Truman to become law.</p>