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THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF RACIAL CAPITALISM ON POOR WHITE LABORERS

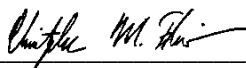
By:

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Partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies
In Social Sciences

Hollins University
Roanoke, Virginia
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Director of Essay:  _____
Professor Christopher Florio

Department: History

To Elliot
My world, my dream, my greatest gift.

To Tracy
My touchstone, my true north, my laughter in the rain

To Devon
My inspiration, my support, and my combat buddy

To Professor Florio
For never giving up on me even when I was about to give up on myself, for being the calm in the storm, and for always keeping me focused on the light at the end of the tunnel.
Because of you, I knew I could.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Racial Capitalism in the American West	13
Culture Clash: Impeding indigenous Advancement	13
Hobos and Herrenvolk	17
Case Study: William Workman and Los Angeles	21
Racial Capitalism in the American East	26
Introduction:	26
Culture Clash: Republicanism vs. Industrial Citizenship	28
Homestead and the Hierarchies of Whiteness	36
Case Study: STRIKE!	40
Conclusion	51
Conclusion	53

List of Figures:

Figure 1: William Workman when Mayor of Los Angeles

Figure 2: The image on the left is Andrew Carnegie circa 1890. The picture on the right is the Homestead Steel Mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892

Figure 3: The National Amalgamated Association and Steelworker Union emblem

Figure 4: Henry Clay Frick circa 1890

Figure 5: homestead and Pittsburgh locations

Figure 6: The Pennsylvania State Police (State Militia) arriving at Homestead, 1892.

Figure 7: John McLuckie and Hugh O'Donnell circa 1892

Figure 8: Unemployment Rates April 2020 and Retail Sales Unemployment April 2020

Figure 9: Chart depicting the relationship between unions and wage gaps between labor and capital.

Figure 10: photographs depicting the disparity in treatment between Black American citizens and white American citizens. White privilege allows white Americans to engage with the police in a quite different way than Black Americans.

“We’ve gotten through communism, but we haven’t.
gotten through capitalism yet.
Life isn’t -isms; it’s people.”
~Ram Dass

INTRODUCTION

“I can’t breathe.”

Those three words uttered by a dying man began a social revolution. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd lay pinned to a Minneapolis sidewalk by Officer Derek Chauvin’s knee. Officer Chauvin knelt on George Floyd’s neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds while Floyd repeatedly expressed both physical pain and his inability to breathe due to Chauvin’s knee cutting off his airway. Floyd begged the officer to remove his knee from Floyd’s neck no less than 10 times. Roughly thirty seconds after Floyd uttered his last words, “I can’t breathe,” his eyes closed, and his body went limp.

The tragic murder of George Floyd at the hands of a law enforcement officer placed a spotlight on the lack of humanity in America’s modern criminal justice system. In fact, Floyd’s last breath gave life to a political revolution aimed at ending the social destruction created by a criminal justice system rooted in racial capitalism. To understand the modern carceral system it is essential to analyze the inception of American’s social, economic, and carceral systems.

However, before the roots of the American carceral system can be analyzed one needs to first return to America’s European roots. Given that America was a British colony, the roots of the carceral system do not begin on American soil. The ideologies upon which it is built stem from as far back as the 5th century practice of Feudalism. Historian Cedric Robinson explains in his book *Black Marxism* that capitalism first appeared in the fifteenth century as an extension of

the feudalist social order.¹ Feudalism was crumbling due to famines, plagues, and peasant uprisings, which threatened the established social order. Clearly, the denigration of feudalism offered the opportunity for an entirely new social structure to be constructed. However, the ruling class was not interested in a new form of social structure. They were interested in keeping the social order of feudalism in place because as Robinson informs us, “The function of the laboring classes was to provide the state and its privileged classes with the material and human resources needed for their maintenance and further accumulations of power and wealth.”² The bourgeoisie simply had no choice but to find another way to dominate the lower class because not only keeping their wealth, but also expanding their wealth, depended upon the subjugation of the lower classes for the extortion of their labor.

Robinson explains how the ruling class need look no further than their current construction of feudalism to solve that problem: capitalism. Encyclopedia Britannica defines capitalism as, “an economic system, dominant in the Western world since the breakup of feudalism, in which most means of production are privately owned and production is guided and income distributed largely through the operation of markets.”³ Capitalism divides people into different categories than those used under feudalism, but it keeps the economic elite in control of the means of production, and ultimately, the means of governance.

America is not simply a capitalist country. America’s form of capitalism is racial capitalism, yet another holdover from the feudal era. Robinson points out the racial element in each class of individuals under feudalism, “The bourgeoisie that led the development of

¹Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.), 19-20.

² Ibid. 21.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica

capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariats and the mercenaries from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds. The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize, but to differentiate--to exaggerate regional subcultural, and dialectical differences into "racial" ones.⁴ America's structure of racial capitalism is essentially the economic, social, and political systems of feudalism with a simple shift in focus from class to race. Instead of class, race became the predominant justification for the subjugation, exploitation, and/or annihilation of non-Europeans.

However, one thing that did not change was the mechanism used to uphold the divisions which kept the system in place: paid mercenaries. From the beginning of capitalism, paid mercenaries ensured that the system remained intact. As feudalism fell and the lower classes began to wage economically based protests, the bourgeoisie needed a way to squash protests and ensure that the lower classes could not break out of their assigned role of labor. They turned to mercenaries paid foreign soldiers. A permanent rift had occurred between the European proletariat and the bourgeoisie as feudalism dissolved making it exceedingly difficult to enlist local men for the military. Bestselling Author and military historian, Alex Axelrod, argues that the use of mercenaries was a constant in the British military approach, "The British Empire long employed paid foreign troops—mercenaries—to keep order and fight wars in and around her colonies. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the British crown hired troops from several German states. These were generically known as Hessians, though Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Hanau were only two sources of them."⁵ Foreign soldiers were more than happy to carry out the

⁴ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 26.

⁵ Alex Axelrod, *Mercenaries: A Guide to Private Armies and Private Military Companies*, (Sage Publications Inc., 2014), 63.

bidding of the European bourgeoisie because the mercenaries' only loyalty was to money. The use of mercenaries had two negative consequences for the European proletariat. One was that because mercenaries did not live in the area, they had no personal relationships with those they policed, so they were not averse to using violence to police the European proletariat to keep the structure of racial capitalism in place. The other negative for the European proletariat was that the foreign mercenaries tended to be former soldiers, which made them "particularly well suited... [to] the suppression of rebellious subjects."⁶ The European proletariat knew that a grassroots economic protest waged by poor, hungry laborers would be no match for the well-trained foreign mercenaries, which created its own form of mental subjugation. From the beginning of racial capitalism, the structure has been protected by violent policing practices meted out by individuals who are not part of the community they police.

With the foreign mercenaries protecting the construct of racial capitalism through policing, the bourgeoisie had the time and energy to insert themselves in the small power vacuum created as feudalism fell, and took over the, "machinery of rule--bureaucracies of administration, regulatory, and extractive concerns...proliferating roles of political economic, and juridical agents of the state."⁷ By owning the means of governance and the judicial power, the bourgeoisie was able to ensure their status as the ruling class. Thus, Robinson argues, it was during the 16th century that racialism and capitalism had a, "systemic interlocking," which would replicate itself in every social system of every European society from that moment on, emphasizing that, "none were immune."⁸ None. Not even the society constructed in a new world over a century later.

⁶ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 22.

⁷ Ibid. 28.

⁸ Ibid. 26.

A century of racial capitalism as the European economic structure passed before the American colonies were established. During that time, Robinson argues that two important factors of racial capitalism were discovered. The first was that capitalists proved to be individuals who were, “an intellectual backward and commercially unimaginative ruling class,” who survived by “their ability to capitalize on the frequent ruptures and breakdowns of the reproduction of populations sunk into the manorial system.”⁹ In short, the bourgeoisie’s only skill was the ability to identify a collapsing system and thus the opportunity to take economic advantage of the lower classes during the social disruption. Robinson argues that this understanding is essential because it proves the systemic nature of racial capitalism. According to Robinson, given that historically each group of capitalists did not stem from the former group of capitalists it is clear that, “racialism and its permutations persisted, not in a particular era but in the civilization itself.”¹⁰ The economic construct of racial capitalism and its underlying foundation of racialism is the only constant between generations of capitalists. Racialism is ingrained in capitalism itself, making any construct based on capitalism an instrument of racialism. Thus, the systems predicated on racial capitalism advance the underlying racialism in a vicious cycle.

The second essential lesson Robinson points out reveals why the founders could not avoid reproducing racial capitalism in the economic and political structures of the American colonies. Robinson maintains that over time the racialism ideology that was the root of racial capitalism became so central to European economic theory that, “it compelled a certain blindness, bemusements that in turn systematically subverted their analytical constructions and

⁹ Ibid. 13-14.

¹⁰ Ibid. 14.

their revolutionary project.”¹¹ The blindness caused by living under an economic system for an extended period of time goes a long way to explain the tension between the ideals of liberty found in the Declaration of Independence and the responsibilities of the American government to provide for the common good of the people found in the preamble to the US Constitution versus the actual construction of racialized American social, economic, and political structures. Whatever revolutionary ideas the founders held, they were unable to implement them because on a subconscious level racialism tainted their thoughts and theories.

The colonization of America was yet another time of social and economic disruption, and the bourgeoisie was ready to capitalize on the advantages before them. The plantation class and the merchant class set about gaining control of the construction of American social, economic, and juridical structures. Not surprising, racialism was at the root of the creation of American capitalism. Robinson makes it clear that, “Labour was the key to the development of the Americas; initially land was plentiful and capital was available to “prime the pump” and labor was provided by African and Afro-American slaves. The source of all value is labor: the value of the new world, the fabulous wealth...created by slaves was enjoyed not only by the planters ...it was reinvested, purchased power and position, and stimulated development in commercial and industrial spheres.”¹² The bourgeoisie successfully recreated the construct of racial capitalism on American soil.

In fact, Robinson makes it clear that it was the social construct of race which ensured that enslaved black labor became the basis for the new American economic construct, “Moreover, the wealth of the plantations drew together the commercial bourgeoisie and the state, implicating them in behaviors and institutions entirely dependent on the existence of slavery and

¹¹ Ibid. 28.

¹² Ibid. 113.

long distance trade.”¹³ Replicating the same racial economic system had the natural effect of creating the same social conditions found in early racial capitalism: a planter/merchant class increasing their wealth by exploiting the labor of enslaved black labor and a violent divide between poor white southern labor and enslaved black labor upheld by policing. The fracture caused between poor white southern labor and enslaved black labor kept the lower classes locked in a battle that prevented them from seeing the larger picture of racial capitalism. In a classic case of being unable to see the forest for the trees, poor white labor overlooked its chance to see enslaved black labor as their compatriots and not their competition.

The southern planter class and the northern merchant class, now firmly in control of both the means of production, governance, and judicial system seemed to have no bounds to their greed, nor any moral limit to what they would do to generate more wealth. While discussing the slave trade necessary to fill the need for almost limitless free labor, Robinson writes, “Perhaps as many as 400,00 of these people [enslaved black laborers] never saw the western end of the Atlantic. They died in transit, and thereby produced one profoundly tragic measure of the extent to which the development of the capitalist world system depended on labor its metropolis could not produce.”¹⁴ The planter class and the merchant class cared nothing for the lives of black men and women whom they viewed to be nothing more than a labor resource.

But what about the poor white laborer who immigrated to the American colonies to make a fresh economic start? How did they fit into this racialized economy? The answer to that is also found in a constructed racial ideology which first appeared in the middle ages: herrenvolk. Herrenvolk is the myth created by the bourgeoisie to explain the naturalness and predestination of some Europeans to dominate other Europeans. Herrenvolk argued that there is a master

¹³ Ibid. 114.

¹⁴ Ibid. 118.

German [Aryan] race because, “Racialists, not satisfied with merely proclaiming the superiority of the white over the colored race, also felt it necessary to erect a hierarchy within the white race itself.”¹⁵ Not only did racialism cause the bourgeoisie to feel entitled to the fruits of enslaved black labor, they also felt justified in obstructing the economic advancement of poor white labor and exploiting their labor as well.

To give some insight into the value the capitalists placed on the lives of poor white labor Robinson tells us that, “The greed of the English and European merchants easily overran their racial and national sympathies. Thus, it was that the crews of their slaving ships died at rates perhaps even higher than their human cargoes.”¹⁶ While the bourgeoisie touted an egalitarian theory for poor white labor as part of their subjugation tactics, the truth is that the lives of poor white laborers meant no more to the planter and merchant class than the lives of enslaved black laborers. However, it must be noted that the oppression white labor faced was an entirely different type of oppression than racism. Clearly, the crews on the slave ships took those jobs freely, they chose to put their lives at risk for extraordinarily little money when they chose to work on a slave ship. At any time, white labor could choose a different job. The black labor on the slave boats were captive on the boat. Those men and women did not board those ships willingly, and their reward for survival of a brutal, inhumane journey was enslavement. Racism is clearly its own form of oppression, which is far more life-threatening and mentally devastating. Robinson’s example shows us that while economic oppression under racial capitalism meant unsafe working conditions and low wages for poor white laborers, it meant neglect, death, and exploitation for the black laborer.

¹⁵ Ibid. 118.

¹⁶ Ibid. 118.

The analysis of America's version of racial capitalism and how modern policing fits into that structure is now much easier understood with the clarification of the historic tie between the version of racial capitalism created at the fall of feudalism and the unique variation of racial capitalism imported to the United States. The murder of George Floyd, a free man living in Minnesota, and the experience of enslaved black labor of the Antebellum period seems tenuous at best, they are in fact closely tied to each other through the same economic system: racial capitalism. George Floyd is the modern example of how far capitalists are willing to go to ensure they have enough free labor to continue to build their wealth. Floyd, accused of a misdemeanor economic crime, was set to become part of the enslaved prison labor population. Had Floyd not died "in transit" he would have become one of the 2.3 million American prison laborers whose labor is being extracted in America's carceral system just as an enslaved black laborer who survived the middle passage joined the roughly 4 million enslaved black laborers of the antebellum area.

George Floyd's murder at the hands of a white police officer is one of many examples of how racial capitalism and the policing methods used to uphold it disproportionately affects black Americans and other non-white Americans. While always remembering that racial capitalism's very nature ensures that non-white Americans suffer incomparable racial oppression, this paper will endeavor to expose the devastation caused to American society by explaining the ways in which racial capitalism destroyed poor white laborers ability to participate fully in the economic system and strangled its chances of living the American dream. It is my hope that by discussing the missing piece of the poor white laborers' experience under racial capitalism will unite poor white laborers and poor black laborers to work together to end racial capitalism, policing, and the carceral system. Together, the poor laboring class of America can overthrow the current divisive,

racialized system and construct new social, economic, and juridical systems based on communal restorative practices.

Chapter 1: Racial Capitalism in the American West

I. Culture Clash: Impeding Indigenous Advancement

“I do not believe that the Great Spirit Chief gave one kind of men the right to tell another kind of men what they must do.”
Chief Joseph
Speech to a White Audience 1879

The first chapter of this thesis analyzes racial capitalism’s transformation of the American West. The development of America’s railroad network, increasing industrialism and urbanization, combined with the West’s resource-based economy placed a premium in the West on laborer’s mobility and occupational adaptability. This chapter will look at how colonization of the west established racial capitalism in the American west and created a large body of floating laborers tied to neither occupation nor one specific place--itinerant laborers. By analyzing itinerancy, defined here as persistent geographic and occupational mobility, to the forefront of an examination of the creation of a working-class during the establishment of the West, specifically the city of Los Angeles, it is easier to answer questions which revolve around how worker mobility and the carceral system shaped class relations and the economic system in the West. The development of the railroad of the region’s railroad network, and increasing urbanization, placed a premium on laborers’ mobility and occupational flexibility¹⁷. Integrating the story of itinerant workers into the analysis of the establishment of racial capitalism in the West

¹⁷ D’Mitri L. Palmateer, “*Along the Itinerant Frontier: Mobility, Class, and Social Reform, Portland, Oregon, 1890–1920.*” (Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2003), 23.

contributes to a growing body of work focused on how the carceral system affects poor white laborers.

According to Carlos Schwante, a history professor and director of the Institute for Pacific Northwest Study at the University of Idaho. “The story of tramping is the story of the mass population movement caused by the industrial transformation of the urban United States.”¹⁸ Schwante further argues in his book, *Hard Traveling: A Portrait of Work Life in the New Northwest*, that itineracy was a “rational response to underemployment and unemployment” in a market defined by natural resource extraction and transportation.¹⁹ In addition, Alex Vitale, in his book, *The End of Policing*, points out that policing exists primarily as a system for managing and even producing inequality by suppressing social movements and tightly managing the behaviors of the poor and nonwhite people.²⁰ In fact, according to Vitale, the earliest origins of policing were tied to three basic social arrangements of inequality in the eighteenth century: slavery, colonialism, and the control of the new working-class.²¹ Herein lies the conflict in the West between the desire of the colonial capitalists to establish racial capitalism in the West by controlling the movements of the poor in order to extract their labor, thus allowing them to make unlimited sums of money for themselves, and the poor white itinerant laborer’s attempt to find a way to break into the new industrial economy of the West.

Before white capitalists arrived to colonize the West, the indigenous people of the west lived a communal lifestyle. The arrival of white settlers intent on claiming the land for themselves disrupted, and ultimately destroyed, the indigenous’ interconnected social construct. This is an important part of the history of the West to understand because the similarities in how

¹⁸ Ibid. 23.

¹⁹ Ibid. 24.

²⁰ Alex X. Vitale, *The End of Policing*. (Verso, 2017), 50.

²¹ Ibid. 52.

the indigenous were initially treated and the way white itinerant laborers were later treated reveal the pattern of racial capitalism's efforts to control the social, economic, and political of groups labeled as subordinate. In fact, General Isaac I. Stevens stated that beginning with, "The Indian wars in the Pacific Northwest during the 1850s, like all Indian troubles in the Far West, resulted from long-standing differences between dissimilar cultures."²² Stevens' statements reveal that wars were fought to ensure that racial capitalism became the only culture in the United States. Like the shocking loss of black labor on transport ships during the slave trade, the genocide suffered by the indigenous at the hands of the white settlers and government representatives is a disturbing indicator of how far the colonizers were willing to go to gain the free labor and social isolation of a differing race. White itinerant laborers' share this pattern of capitalists showing reckless disregard for human life of those they consider inferior. The dangerous method of travelling the rails caused, "a tremendously high number of deaths and injuries per year. A contemporary investigator claimed that 50 railroads nationwide were responsible for 25,236 deaths between 1901 and 1905 alone."²³ The tendency for capitalists to view black, brown, and poor white laborers as resources instead of humans allowed for a dangerous mindset that cost millions of people their lives.

In fact, General Isaac I. Stevens', former military soldier and later Governor of Washington Territory, formulation of Indian policy, declaration of martial law, and his relationship with the military elucidated the separate and aggressive nature of racial capitalism were all present in the speech he gave when he spoke to the Nez Perces at a treaty council²⁴.

Because Section 8 of the Commerce Act allows for the government, "To regulate commerce with

²²Kent Richards, "Isaac I. Stevens and Federal Military Power in Washington Territory," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* Vol. 63, No. 3 (Jul. 1972), 82.

²³ Palmateer, "Along the itinerant frontier," 89.

²⁴ Richards, "Isaac I. Stevens and Federal Military Power in Washington Territory," 83.

foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes”²⁵ infantilizes the indigenous, General Stevens viewed the Indians as children who he would protect if they were obedient and who he would mete out punishment to when they were naughty. He told the Nez Perces that white people were moving in and wanted their land, so he advocated “the land marked out so that Indians and white men could be separated. If they were to live in peace it was necessary, he said, that the Indians should have a country set apart for them, and in that country must stay.”²⁶ Whereas the indigenous found their community safety in the bonds of the tribe and kept the village at peace through restorative justice approaches, the white men found safety in complete separation of the races and argued that their community was kept peaceful through segregationist policies. It was clear at this point that the white settlers were not willing to find a balance between the two cultures, which reveals their need for total control of both the human and natural resources native to America.

After years of conflict with the indigenous, which included trickery, violence, and the use of a newly created carceral system the culture clash ended with the installation of racial capitalism as the economic, political, and juridical system of the west. In 1877, General Howard, U.S. Union officer in the American Civil War (1861–65) who headed the Freedmen’s Bureau (1865–72) to help rehabilitate former slaves during the period of Reconstruction, arrived threatening to bring in the American version of mercenaries. He told the indigenous chiefs that he “was the ‘white war chief of all that country.’ Howard warned, ‘I have a great many soldiers at my back...The country belongs to the Government, and I intend to make you go upon the reservation...’”.²⁷ Howard used the newly created Commerce Clause to control the movement of

²⁵United States Constitution, Commerce Act, Section 8.

²⁶ Steven L, Danver, *Revolts, Protests, Demonstrations, and Rebellions in American History: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, California 2011). 210.

²⁷ Ibid. 210.

the indigenous in the area. The Commerce Clause, which grants Congress the power, "to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes," essentially infantilized the indigenous by taking away their ability to control their own social and economic agency as citizens of the United States. Just as Black labor in the south was infantilized by Jim Crow laws during Reconstruction, Howard simply used his experience of colonizing the south during reconstruction to colonize the American West. From local ordinances, to state laws, to the United States Constitution itself, and ultimately the use of the American Military, the white settlers used laws, policing, and incarceration to decimate the indigenous culture and its people. Colonization effectively established the social construction of racial capitalism in the west.

II. HOBOS AND HERRENVOLK

With the indigenous culture effectively devastated and the indigenous people successfully socially isolated, the white settlers in what is now Los Angeles began building a new city which they envisioned as the, "Eden of the Saxon Homeseeker."²⁸ In the book, *Police Power*: Markus Dubber clarifies the role of police when it came to any subgroup of people deemed subordinate to the bourgeoisie. He writes, "The new American state was a republic, but a republic of householders. It was the householders who were to participate in government, indirectly or directly, by voting and being voted for, and resolving disputes among themselves. But the government did not stop there. Government, also meant, as it always had, policing others. And so everyone, and everything else incapable of self-governance was to be policed by those who were so capable."²⁹ The ideology of racial capitalism, upon which it appears clear the city of Los

²⁸ Kelly Lytle Hernández, "Hobos in Heaven," *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (2014), 425.

²⁹ Markus Dirk Dubber, *The Police Power: Patriarchy and the Foundations of American Government* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.), 25.

Angeles was established, leaves out any concept of its marginalized poor white itinerant workers, just as the newly freed Black laborers were left out of the government and economy in the South, and the indigenous were originally left out of the government and economy in the West.

When the employment opportunities offered by wheat fields, fruit orchards, and forests dried up in the northern portions of the West, itinerants migrated to urban centers like Los Angeles where they hoped to find work in a more temperate climate³⁰. Since racial capitalism requires a large amount of free labor to build the wealth of the capitalists, the presence of marginalized white itinerant laborers was a necessity for the capitalist in Los Angeles if LA were to become a thriving economic center. Perhaps a loathed necessity from the capitalist's perspective, but a necessity none-the-less. Given that the bourgeois had no intention of allowing poor white laborers into the economic structure of the system, an organization which would control the movements and economic opportunity of the poor white itinerant laborers arriving in Los Angeles during the winter was constructed: the penal system. As David Garland points out, when it comes to the building of penal institutions, one cannot separate the rhetoric from the material actions taken based on that rhetoric. He reminds us that the construction of penal institutions contribute to the formation of society and both embody and express society's cultural norms.³¹ With that in mind, it is important to point out that "homeseeker" was understood at the time to mean the, "middle class, midwestern, Anglo-American family."³² Looking at the specific vocabulary chosen to describe Los Angeles, one can see the feudal roots of racialism in the word "Saxon" along with the concept of a white capitalist class for whom a city would be established.

³⁰ Palmateer, "Along the itinerant frontier," 89.

³¹ David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (University of Chicago Press. 1990), 192.

³² Hernández, "Hobos in Heaven," 422.

Importantly, Los Angeles was not established for all white people. The community development plan was based on the white middle-class family, and by 1880, the city's population was majority Anglican American.³³ Even so, poor white itinerant labor was not a consideration when establishing Los Angeles. Even though the West's natural resource-based economy, which required a large body of mobile workers to work temporary jobs or find winter employment, their needs were not considered in the overall political, economic, or social structures created in Los Angeles.³⁴ In fact, poor white itinerant labor became victims of oppression resulting from the feudal concept of *herrenvolk*. Indigent itinerant laborers who travelled to LA during the winter when their seasonal work in northern California was complete were labeled as "tramps" - a danger not just to the city, but to all Anglo Americans. Trampologists functioning during a time of social and economic upheaval from the 1870's -1910's warned that the poor white migrant workers threatened the foundations of society. Tramps were labeled as viscous, worthless, incorrigible, depraved, and, "a racial threat to the nation's progress and vigor...if left uncontained they could unravel Anglo-American society from within."³⁵ Describing tramps as a "racial" threat reveals the power of the ideology of *herrenvolk*. The tramps may have been white, but they were a different "strain" of white men.³⁶

To ensure their ability to both control the social movements of the white itinerant laborers and to extract their labor, vagrancy laws were constructed and adapted whenever necessary. Vagrancy, defined as, "the state of being a vagrant; homeless" became a key aspect of policing in Los Angeles. Vagrancy was unique in terms of laws because the vagrancy statutes were meant to punish a status as opposed to a type of conduct. In this instance a law was applied

³³ Ibid. 422.

³⁴ Palmateer, "Along the itinerant frontier,"

³⁵ Hernández, "Hobos in Heaven," 413.

³⁶ Ibid. 413.

to a class of people instead of individual actions.³⁷ While itinerancy was “a common response by skilled laborers...to an economic system dominated by peripatetic capital...it was not confined to those living on the margins of society,” we see rhetoric which relates only to the portion of itinerant workers who were marginalized to justify the imprisonment of these travelling workers to protect the social construct of racial capitalism.³⁸

Josiah Flynt, the nation’s leading Trampologist of the time, made it clear that poor white labor was a threat to white capitalist culture. Just like the natives before them, Flynt argued that these poverty-stricken white workers needed to be “quarantined” to prevent the evils found in poverty from spreading into the upper-class white class. Flynt made an important distinction between poor white laborers and poor black and indigenous workers. A distinction that still haunts American society today. Flynt argued that poor white people could “catch criminality but were not born criminals.”³⁹ This viral criminality meant that poor white laborers could share in some aspects of Anglo-American culture, but they had to be kept separate to ensure that if one had been infected with lawlessness, they could not spread it and destroy the sum of white culture. To protect elite Anglo-American culture, the judiciary clarified who could be controlled and who was to control. In the 1837 Supreme Court case, *New York V. Miln*, the justices ruled that captains of slave ships were required to post bond for their human cargo once they unloaded on shore. This ruling placed vagrancy in a larger system of policing and was directed at the elimination of threats from within and without.⁴⁰ While the original ruling references stolen Black labor arriving in the United States, it was easily applied to the “tramp” of the West.

³⁷ Dubber, *The Police Power*, 58.

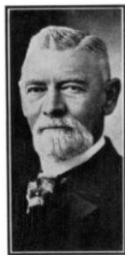
³⁸ Palmateer, “Along the itinerant frontier,” 94.

³⁹ Hernández, “Hobos in Heaven,” 422.

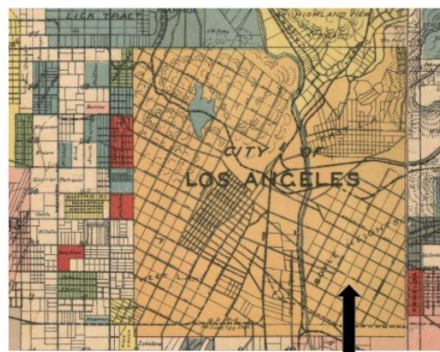
⁴⁰ Dubber, *The Police Power*, 60.

So, what did this concept of outlaw poor white laborers who had to be segregated from the wealthy white capitalists mean to the itinerant worker? Imprisonment and an individual lifestyle. Like the indigenous before them, they were to be “caged” in prisons or isolated in poverty-stricken neighborhoods. Laws, mostly misdemeanors, such as vagrancy, public drunkenness, sleeping in public places, loud behavior, immoral behavior, and the mere suspicion that a person was a vagrant that had originally been used to imprison the indigenous were now used to imprison the poor white itinerant workers.⁴¹ Living an individual lifestyle prevented itinerant workers from being able to unionize to create a collective that would protect their wages and rights as industrial citizens. In addition, incarceration also prevented itinerant labor from organizing. Since the police are the point of contact between the citizens and the “coercive apparatus of the state,” the police can be said to exist in order to, “fabricate social order.” The social order the police continually both fabricate and uphold is the capitalistic status quo of racial capitalism.⁴² Once incarcerated, poor white laborers became the free labor needed to build the wealth for the capitalist class in Los Angeles.

III. CASE STUDY: William Workman and Los Angeles



— From Collection of J. Gregg Layne
WILLIAM H. WORKMAN
Mayor of Los Angeles,
1887-1888



Boyle Heights 1889

⁴¹ Hernández, "Hobos in Heaven," 422.

⁴² Vitale, *The End of Policing*, 54

[Figure 1. The photograph on the left shows William Workman during the years he was the Mayor of Los Angeles. The image on the right depicts the location of Boyle Heights in 1889.]

William Workman was Mayor of Los Angeles from 1887-1888. Before his tenure as Mayor, Workman was a member of the City Council for several terms: 1872-1874 and 1875-1880 and was one of the founding members of the Chamber of Commerce, for which he served as Vice-President. Later, he worked as the City Treasurer from 1901-1907. Born wealthy and the owner of a Saddlery and Harness business himself, Workman is the perfect example of a capitalist who insinuated himself into the means of governance and used laws to incarcerate itinerant workers to exploit their labor and build his wealth. While Workman was the Mayor, the position of mayor included being the misdemeanor judge. This offers the perfect example of why capitalists were intent on owning the means of governance. As a capitalist, who needs free labor to make mass amounts of money, being the mayor and misdemeanor judge gave Workman the ability to use the carceral system as the means of gaining free labor. California was a hard labor state, and a guilty finding on misdemeanor charges under Workman came with a sentence to the chain gang for anywhere from 15 days to 60 days. Under Workman's tenure, the most charged crimes of vagrancy and public drunkenness came with the longest sentences of 60 days and 50 days on the chain gang, respectively.⁴³ It is not hard to make a clear connection between Workman's need for unlimited free labor and his choice to prosecute the misdemeanors that would provide him with the most free laborers. Workman successfully socially isolated itinerant laborers for a large part of the summer months during which they would be in Los Angeles, while ensuring he had a surplus of free labor during months which have prime weather for construction work.

⁴³Marco Newmark, "The Workman Family in Los Angeles." *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* Vol. 32, No. 4 (December, 1950), 318.

Following Josiah Flynt's advice that imprisoning these itinerant tramps would stop tramping and his own greed, Workman began to fill the prisons. The strategy of using incarceration to socially quarantine and extract the tramps labor resulted in one of the nation's most dramatic booms in incarceration at the turn of the 20th century and changed the race of those who were imprisoned. The white tramp replaced the indigenous in the jails. By 1890, 88% of the inmates in the west were white, most were unemployed or underemployed laborers. In 1904, white men were 92% of Los Angeles's prison population, and in 1910, white men comprised 89% of prisoners housed in Los Angeles--most convicted of misdemeanor crimes.⁴⁴ Racial capitalism clearly does not protect poor white laborers. While it might seem like white laborers would benefit from racial capitalism, they in fact face their own form of oppression based on the ranking of herrenvolk and the concept of the "right" kind of white. The statistics prove that once the indigenous were effectively brought under control, the capitalist-controlled government set its sight on controlling the new working-class of poor and itinerant white laborers.

As capitalists in Los Angeles saw poor white itinerant laborers as a necessary evil needed to work for either free or extremely low wages, for the workers, the city represented the opportunity to find, "temporary work, temporary housing in the municipal jail, or in one of the numerous cheap boarding houses."⁴⁵ The concept of temporary housing in a municipal jail being an opportunity can be explained by how itinerant laborers defined their role in society. Poor, white itinerant laborers defined their role in society by the temporary, transient nature of the backbreaking work they did, as well as their residential marginalization and their familiarity with

⁴⁴ Hernández, "Hobos in Heaven," 421.

⁴⁵ Palmateer, "Along the itinerant frontier," 86.

police authority under racial capitalism's mandates.⁴⁶ For the poor white itinerant laborers of the West, a stint in prison working for free was a part of the economic lifestyle they found themselves living. Instead of being outraged at their treatment as legitimate American laborers, they accepted the idea that, for them, making a living, would likely include time in jail at one point or another. After all, they worked primarily under a foreman or camp boss when they were working in orchards and wheat fields. Their constant contact with authority figures who can control their movement when outside of prison, would make being in prison an experience that would not feel particularly different than the last temporary position they just left.⁴⁷

Workman wasted no time using the unlimited free labor of prisoners to build his wealth. Workman became mayor in January of 1887, and that same month began major road construction projects, which directly benefited his current and future business endeavors. First, convict laborers, under the supervision of an overseer and armed guards, cut and paved the roads in front of the government buildings and other businesses on the same street. Then, they "cut key thoroughfares, macadamized roads, raised sidewalks, picked up trash, dug holes, filled holes, fixed bridges, and both built and beautified parks."⁴⁸ Specifically, prison labor cut and filled seventh street leading to Boyle Heights, Workman's privately owned property he was converting into a subdivision for the homeseekers arriving in LA, as well as all the roads in the subdivision itself. Prisoners also cut and graded Hollenbeck Park located next to Boyle Park and the recently built bridge.

By December of 1887, prison labor was proving so lucrative that LA's City Council stopped taking private bids for construction projects in favor of using prison labor and by

⁴⁶ Ibid. 86.

⁴⁷ Palmateer, "Along the itinerant frontier," 88,

⁴⁸ Hernández, "Hobos in Heaven," 415.

January of 1888, the chain gang participated in paving 87 miles of LA's city streets.⁴⁹ The decision to move to prison labor as the means of building the city of Los Angeles effectively made it impossible for poor, white laborers who made their money in construction to be part of the growing economy. The general construction jobs performed by prison labor made it possible for citizens to access Boyle Heights, and the building and beautifying of parks which adjoined Boyle Heights made the subdivision a desirable neighborhood ultimately saved Workman an enormous amount of money he would otherwise have had to pay a private contractor and construction crew.

In a stunning display of joining the capitalist class and the means of governance, by the early 20th century, the chain gang was a wing of LA's City Streets Department. Six full-time asphalt workers were the only free labor under LA's Streets Department. The prison provided a chain gang of several dozen inmates per day, supplied an overseer to supervise the chain gang during construction, as well as an additional 10 full time guards.⁵⁰ Assuming that three dozen inmates were provided per day, prison labor was filling 47 paid full-time jobs, for which the "tramps" could have been hired. If itinerant workers had employment year-round through their seasonal jobs, poor white laborers would most likely have been able to gain economic advancement over time. Had an itinerant laborer been able to secure full-time, year-round employment, he would have the opportunity to save money. Instead, "cyclical unemployment wiped out itinerants cash reserves and kept them continually off-balance."⁵¹ When individuals must constantly search for work and cannot accumulate enough funds to buy a home, they are essentially disenfranchised from the social and political systems of the United States. If itinerant

⁴⁹ Ibid. 439-440.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 439.

⁵¹ Palmateer, "Along the itinerant frontier," 90.

workers were socially and politically disenfranchised, they had no means by which to change the laws and systems which kept them in a cycle of unemployment. They could not participate as full American citizens as a new class of industrial citizens, leaving the running of the governmental apparatuses which exploited their labor in the hands of those doing the exploiting.

With some cash to spare, an itinerant worker may have chosen to use that money to move someplace where full-time work was available without having to travel. The ability to move to a place with stable work and to put down roots in a town, opens the door to economic advancement that just might provide enough generation wealth for his children to start out their lives as middle-class citizens. While it is, of course, impossible to know exactly how the itinerant workers would have used the profits of their labor, it is fair to acknowledge that they would have at least had the chance to improve their economic situation.

Instead of arresting the itinerant workers and exploiting their labor, Workman and other LA Capitalists could have hired the men each winter upon their return. However, Workman would not have been able to accumulate even more wealth if he had to pay laborers to cut and pave the bridges that led to Boyle Heights, as well as the subdivision itself. If he had to pay out of pocket to have parks cut and beautified as a draw to living in his subdivision, Workman would have had to use the initial profits from the sale of lots in Boyle Heights to reimburse his original investments. Racial capitalism focuses only on the economic advancement of the capitalists. Therefore, Workman, like other capitalists, relied on the tried-and-true economic pattern of cashing in on the free labor of those considered socially beneath them. While the skin of the itinerant workers was white like the capitalists, herrenvolk allowed the modern bourgeoisie to justify stealing their labor for their own profits.

Chapter 2: Racial Capitalism in the American East

I. Introduction:

The power of place is often a defining feature for an individual. For the itinerant laborer of Los Angeles, geography itself contributed to their ability to fully participate in America's social and economic. The city of Los Angeles was established with the economic, social, and political structures of racial capitalism. From the establishment of the city, the capitalist class seized the means of governance to ensure that paternalistic nature of racial capitalism became status quo and used the carceral system to ensure it remained so. Workman offers the perfect example of what the structures of racial capitalism look like in real life and how they play themselves out in the lives of real Americans. His choice to lift prison labor to the position of the primary form of labor in Los Angeles during his tenure cut the local poor white laborer out of the local economy and ensured that itinerant laborers could never gain an economic foothold. Both types of laborers were thus denied the ability to afford a home, which was the key to political agency as a citizen of the United States. Workman's decision to govern as a capitalist in the larger structure of racial capitalism guaranteed that the economy, thus the political power in the local governments remained in the hands of the bourgeois class.

In part 2 of this chapter, the analysis of how racial capitalism affects the poor, white laborers focus on a geographic location which offered a completely converse experience to that of the itinerant laborer in Los Angeles. Homestead, Pennsylvania offered a hugely different experience to the poor white laborer of the Pennsylvania steel mills, specifically steelworkers for Homestead Steel Works located in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Just six miles upstream from Pittsburgh, located on the Monongahela river, Homestead was a town with a unique social, political, and juridical structure. Homestead was described as, "a working-class community...it was a relatively new community, lacking the entrenched elite of bankers, landowners, and

professionals who often controlled politics and public life in older, more established towns,” like Pittsburgh.⁵² Homestead reveals the ways in which capital uses racial discrimination, policing, and the carceral system to ultimately suppress even those white laborers who achieved the status of homeowner from making economic gains in order to ensure that labor is subjugated under the system of racial capitalism.

II. Culture Clash: Republicanism vs. Industrial Citizenship

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, like Los Angeles, California was established by the bourgeoisie class. While capitalists like William H. Workman took over the means of governance in Los Angeles to ensure the economic, social, and political structure of racial capitalism increased his wealth, industrialists like Andrew Carnegie went about ensuring that racial capitalism became the economic, social, and political structure in the East for their financial benefit. Colonization was the roots of racial capitalism in the West while industrialization was the roots of racial capitalism in the East. Andrew Carnegie’s reaction to the steel mill workers strike in 1892 reveals how far he, as an industrialist, was willing to go to gain cheap labor and the social discrimination against other white citizens to build his wealth as a capitalist.

Once again, the question for Pittsburgh during the industrial era was whether the region would choose a communal economic, social, and political structure represented by the skilled steel workers union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW) or reproducing the same divisive social structure inherent in racial capitalism, which would produce unfettered wealth for industrialists like Carnegie. The answer to the basic question at hand rested

⁵²Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892*. (Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 63.

on how one defined, “social stability, order, justice, equality, security, as well as economy.”⁵³ Economist John Commons argued that social ethics determined how economic disputes are resolved, and noted that there were two theories of ethics in existence during this era, “one was the individualistic theory of the maximum of pleasure in a world of abundance, where the individual could not injure others by taking all he wanted. The other was the social theory of conflict of interests in a world of scarcity where the individual may injure others if he takes all he wants.”⁵⁴ Commons noted that these disparate viewpoints, “resulted in an irreconcilable dualism of the two principles of the individual and society.”⁵⁵ It was in this economic divide that one of the most crucial battles between labor and capital occurred.

Andrew Carnegie, owner of US Steel, was an example of the rags-to-riches story which drew abundant numbers of immigrants to the United States in search of the American Dream. Carnegie himself was a Scottish immigrant whose first job in the United States was as a bobbin boy in a Pittsburgh cotton factory at the age of 12.⁵⁶ Pittsburgh, while considered the center of the new industrial world in 1848 when the Carnegie family arrived, was described as “hell with the lid off” because of the grime and squalor in the city as well as the fierce battles between labor and capital as each attempted to accumulate wealth. Pittsburgh was an economic, social, and political battleground in which the accumulation of wealth and power were the guiding ideologies.⁵⁷

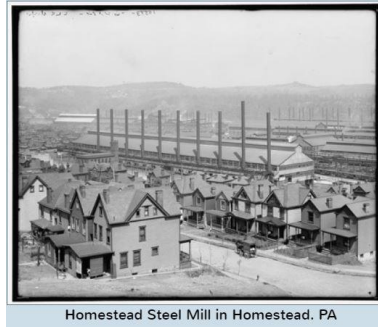
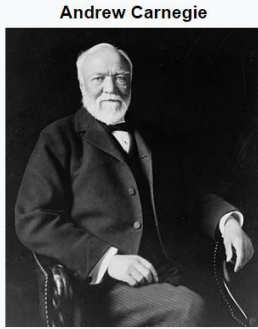
⁵³Kenneth H. Parsons and John R. Commons, "John R. Commons' Point of View." *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 18, no. 3 (1942): 260.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 260.

⁵⁵ John R. Commons, "Law and Economics." *The Yale Law Journal* 34, no. 4 (1925), 374.

⁵⁶ Christopher Klein, “Andrew Carnegie Claimed to Support Unions, But Then Destroyed Them in His Steel Empire.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, (29 July 2019)

⁵⁷ Ibid.2



[Figure 2: The image on the left is Andrew Carnegie circa 1890. The picture on the right is the Homestead Steel Mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892]

It was in this dog-eat-dog environment that Andrew Carnegie came of age. After working as a bobbin boy, Carnegie worked as a messenger for a telegraph company, where he met a man named Thomas A. Scott, through whom Carnegie gained employment at Pennsylvania Railroad. There he then worked his way up to become Superintendent of the Pittsburgh Division of Pennsylvania Railroad.⁵⁸ Ultimately, Carnegie entered the steel industry and established Carnegie Steel. Finally, as owner of Carnegie Steel Company, in 1883 Carnegie purchased the two steel mills operating in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Carnegie's early experience with poverty affected him deeply. Carnegie once asserted during a commencement address at Carnegie Institute of Technology (Carnegie Mellon University), "My father was a handloom weaver, and when the power loom was introduced, my father was out of work. I began to learn what poverty meant. It was burnt into my heart then that my father had to beg for work. And then and there came the resolve that I would cure that when I got to be a man. **My ambition for riches is what marked my path in life.**"⁵⁹ Having experienced extreme poverty and then extreme wealth, Carnegie was a bit of an enigma when it came to his approach to labor in his steel factories.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 2.

⁵⁹ Anushka Jain, "Commencement Address of Andrew Carnegie." *Turn of Pages*, (25 Dec. 2015)

Carnegie attempted to find a balance between his personal experience of growing up in poverty with his position as an industrialist accumulating unfettered amounts of wealth. Carnegie claimed to be a man of the laborer and to support the unions. He expressed his seemingly pro-union views when he wrote in *Forum* magazine in 1886, “The right of the working man to combine and to form trades-unions is no less sacred than the right of the manufacturer to enter into associations and conferences with his fellows, and it must be sooner or later conceded.”⁶⁰ And during the Haymarket Riot Carnegie showed empathy for the workers who rioted after police shot strikers from the McCormick Reaper Works, who were fighting for 8 hour work days when he agreed that, “To expect that one dependent upon his daily wage for the necessities of life will stand peaceably and see a new man employed in his stead is to expect much.”⁶¹ Carnegie could easily have seen his own father in the faces of laborers fighting for economic survival. From this quote one could conclude that Carnegie understood that, as John Commons (October 13, 1862 – May 11, 1945), an American institutional economist, Georgist, and progressive and labor historian at the University of Wisconsin–Madison⁶² argued, “Our subject-matter is the transactions of human beings in producing, acquiring, and rationing wealth by cooperation, conflict, and the rules of the game.”⁶³ More, one might conclude that Carnegie shared the same understanding of the rules of business with union members. Yet, just 6 years later, his actions when his own steel mill laborers went on strike stood in stark opposition to his public support of labor and reflected instead the last part of his quote in his commencement speech.

⁶⁰ Klein, “Andrew Carnegie Claimed to Support Unions, But Then Destroyed Them in His Steel Empire,” 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 2.

⁶² Kenneth H. Parsons and John R. Commons, "John R. Commons' Point of View." *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 18, no. 3 (1942): 260.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 261.

In 1892, Carnegie was forced to make a choice between his history as both a child of a laborer and a laborer himself and his current role as a prominent Pittsburgh industrialist. Similarly, to the culture clash between the homeseekers in Los Angeles, the steel mill workers represented by the union the Amalgamated Association engaged in years of conflict with Carnegie before the final showdown at Homestead in 1892. The conflict between the Amalgamated Association members and Carnegie revolved around Carnegie's business tactic of, "Watch the costs, and the profits will take care of themselves." By far, labor would have been Carnegie's greatest cost. In fact, W.E.B. DuBois pointed out, "The North had yielded to democracy, but only because democracy was curtailed by a dictatorship of property and investments which left in the hands of the leaders of industry such economic power as insured their mastery and their profits. Less than this they knew perfectly well they could not yield, and more than this they would not."⁶⁴ Whatever beliefs Carnegie had about the importance of unions to the working man it does not seem to have been able to override the potential trauma which lingered from his days in poverty. For Carnegie to feel free it seemed essential that he be able to accumulate enough well to drown the voice of his inner child who still seems to have felt that at any moment poverty could return.

In contrast, the labor in his steel mills saw Carnegie's unfettered accumulation of wealth as a direct threat to their independence and liberty. European immigrants themselves, they saw firsthand what happens to labor under a plutocracy. The same fear of poverty, and the absence of freedom they believed was inherent in it, from which Carnegie suffered, plagued immigrant laborers. While the fear both sides felt was the same, the answer to addressing that fear and

⁶⁴ Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. (New York: S. A. Russell, 1956). 46.

creating a life of liberty had a vastly different answer. In fact, labor was “determined to build an alternative to capitalism,” which was based on values that “undermines the foundation of the existing order...and would ignore the present and accepted theories of value.”⁶⁵ For labor, stopping the unfettered accumulation of wealth was achieved through ensuring they fairly benefited from the value of their labor. In steel mills, the physical work of the men combined with the latest mechanical processes to create products for Carnegie to sell, and labor knew that there was a pointed intent to, “economize on labor” for Carnegie to make the largest profit possible.⁶⁶



[Figure 3: The National Amalgamated Association and Steelworker Union emblem]

Just as the indigenous in California found their safety in community ties, skilled labor found its freedom in the communal ties forged by labor unions. John Commons (October 13, 1862 – May 11, 1945), an American institutional economist, Georgist, progressive and labor historian at the University of Wisconsin–Madison⁶⁷ studied the earliest unions and argued that they were a response to not only the mechanization brought about by the industrial revolution, but also a need to protect white labor’s market value from competition from such sources as

⁶⁵ Ibid. 8-9.

⁶⁶ Parsons, Kenneth H., and John R. Commons. "John R. Commons' Point of View." *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 18, no. 3 (1942): 262. Accessed January 11, 2021. doi:10.2307/3159056.

⁶⁷ Malcolm Rutherford, “Wisconsin Institutionalism: John R. Commons and His Students.” *Labor History*, Volume 47, Issue 2 (2006) 22.

prison labor, slave labor, indentured servitude, apprentices, and child labor. Commons described those competitive market forces as, “competitive menaces” which he argued, “led to competition for lower costs, lower wages, and employment conditions.”⁶⁸ The steel mill workers in Homestead were up against the mechanizations in the steel industry, which resulted in “a major transformation of the iron and steel industry,” as well as prison labor such as was being used in Los Angeles, and the use of unpaid apprentices.⁶⁹ The irony that skilled laborers had to fight Carnegie for living wages when Carnegie’s own father had lost employment due to mechanization is intriguing. Yet, fight he did.



[Figure 4: Henry Clay Frick circa 1890]

Amalgamated Steel and Carnegie had their first conflict in 1889 when Carnegie bought the already established Homestead steel mill. Carnegie put his partner Henry Clay Frick, a notorious anti-union industrialist, in charge. Frick immediately attempted to break a longstanding wage agreement between the steel workers union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW), and the prior owners of the mill. Frick immediately attempted to cut worker pay, extend their hours, and destroy the union. On 18 May, 1892, Frick arranged a meeting with the AAISW’s mill committee and presented the company’s proposal for the new

⁶⁸ Ibid. 23.

⁶⁹ Linda Schneider, "The Citizen Striker: Workers' Ideology in the Homestead Strike of 1892." *Labor History* 23, no. 1 (1982): 48.

contracts, which expired 30 June of that year. The company explained to them men that to bring the relationship between labor and capital to one in which the company could compete with other steel mills, the company would, “impose on 1 July a sliding scale that would reduce overall wages by approximately 25 percent and place the entire work force on a twelve-hour day...the company declared all positions in the mill vacant as of 1 June; old hands would have to reapply for work and could then, as *individuals*, sign three year ironclad contracts.”⁷⁰ This move would accomplish several things for Carnegie. First, it would keep the relationship between labor and capital that of a servant and master as was the customary working relationship in the United States during the colonial era, which had been inherited from British Common Law⁷¹. Secondly, it would save him money on his costs so that he could continue to accumulate mass amounts of wealth. Thirdly, it would end the AAISW’s power because the skilled workers would have to agree to sign the contracts as individuals instead of union members.

However, Robinson points out that the AAISW represented a hugely different type of white immigrant worker. One, which Robinson argues immigrated to the United States as a laborer, “but was unwilling to stay in the labor class.”⁷² Just as Carnegie’s father had immigrated to the United States to create a better life, so too had the skilled laborers in the Homestead Steel Works. They were as unwilling to remain poor as Carnegie himself was and like Carnegie, saw the concept of republicanism in American democracy as the key to ensuring their ability to improve their economic status. Importantly, Robinson highlights how the concept of the American Dream inherent in American republicanism was the Achilles heel for capitalists. He declares the industrial worker “as the negation of capitalist society; the force produced by

⁷⁰ Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892*. (Pittsburgh PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.),19.

⁷¹ Ibid. 20.

⁷²Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 201.

capitalism that could finally destroy it.”⁷³ Pointedly, it was capitalism itself that Robinson claims became the driving force behind militant labor protests. In 1889, the Homestead steel workers were “well aware that a decisive confrontation was close at hand, and that it would make a turning point in a decades-long war fought in every mill in Greater Pittsburgh, at its polling places, and in the hearts and minds of its residents.”⁷⁴ The battle between labor and capital playing out in Homestead in 1889 was no less a struggle for the future of America’s economic, social, and political future as was the war between the Homeseekers in Los Angeles and the indigenous in that area.

The contest between labor and capital that played out in Homestead in 1889 was just one skirmish leading up the infamous Homestead strike of 1892. The strike of 1889 was crucial in the larger war between a communal approach and individualistic approach to economics for several reasons. First, Homestead stood together as one united town. Together, the skilled laborers, unskilled laborers, and petit bourgeois shopkeepers and landlords pulled together as one working-class with one unified goal of maintaining their civic liberty through controlling the value of their labor, which Linda Schneider calls Industrial Citizenship, that would not be trifled with. The hive mind created in Homestead during the 1889 strike proved vital for the later 1892 strike. Also, even though labor took a hit to wages, Carnegie lost the battle and if, as Carnegie’s mentor claimed, “severe competition and process, the survival of the fittest is the rule. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the ironman and steel trades. The firms who are holding their own...are those who have supplemented their skill by taking advantage of the latest improvements and have substituted machines in every possible instance for mere brute force,

⁷³ Ibid. 233.

⁷⁴Krause, “The Battle for Homestead,” 21.

thereby increasing their output...⁷⁵ the battle of Homestead in 1889 did not definitively decide who, labor or capital, was the fittest.

III Homestead and the Hierarchies of Whiteness

A mere six miles downstream from Pittsburgh, Homestead was a different world. Situated on the Monongahela River, Homestead was established by steel mill workers. In contrast to both Los Angeles and Pittsburgh, Homestead was established by labor and not capitalists. Returning to Garland's theory that the rhetoric of an era and a place cannot be separated from the material actions taken, Homestead exemplifies the type of social constructs put into place based on the industrial citizen's idea of republicanism. The ideology and character of what Linda Schneider refers to as working-class republicanism reinterpreted the economic, social, and political structure of racial capitalism in Homestead.⁷⁶ Schneider's definition of working-class republicanism echoes John Common's explanation of the theory that an individual accumulating massive amounts of money injures others. In short, she describes working-class republicanism as the belief that industrialists, Carnegie specifically, were undermining American values of "liberty, rights, independence, the rule of law," and saw, "a growing plutocracy, a privileged

⁷⁵Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 244-250.

⁷⁶ Linda Schneider, "The Citizen Striker: Workers' Ideology in the Homestead Strike of 1892." *Labor History* 23, no. 1 (1982): 47.

class of corporations,” who jeopardized their ability to remain homeowners and threatened to limit their political rights through wage slavery.⁷⁷ After all, their definition of republicanism was built on the premise that the goal of a society should be to preserve the common good, citizens should be virtuous and subordinate their private interests to public needs as part of ensuring a stable society, citizens could only be virtuous if they were independent, and that citizens had to participate in society to ensure that tyrants could not take over control.⁷⁸

Homestead became an organic example of working-class republicanism. David Garland argues that cultural and psychological changes are the outcome of changing patterns of social interdependency and material support, which then create a situational pressure for cultural development.⁷⁹ At the same time industrialization was disrupting the relationship between labor and capital, the idea of property rights was also changing. While labor was working to shake off the historic master/servant relationship in the workplace, they were benefitting from a changing concept of how property rights are bestowed on citizens. John Commons explains that in place of, “the concept of property as a complex set of acquired rights, of imposed duties, and of permitted liberties and exposure derived from a great variety of customs which landlords, guilds, businessmen...and courts authorize,” property rights were now being determined by “the daily habits, practices, and customs of the people.”⁸⁰ The bourgeois class was losing its iron grip on both white labor’s economic subservience and their dependence on their willingness to give them property rights in society. Homestead became a model of the economic and political changes occurring during the industrial revolution.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 52.

⁷⁸ Slavish, "working-class Muscle," 338.

⁷⁹ Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society*, 197-198.

⁸⁰ Commons, "Law and Economics," 376.

Whereas capitalists filled the positions of government in both Los Angeles and Pittsburgh, Homestead's governmental positions were held by labor: AAISW union members. Schneider argues that, "Because of the town's late foundation and rapid growth there was no entrenched local elite of landowners, bankers, professionals, etc. In the absence of a resident nobility with longstanding control of town affairs, the steelworkers administered the town and determined its social character."⁸¹ Skilled workers played prominent roles in the community and, "they organized social affairs such as picnics, parades and singing societies."⁸² In addition to union members holding government positions, the Steelworkers had such purchasing power in town that even petit bourgeois business owners respected the worker's influence. Homestead was very much a working-class town. In this environment, a solid concept of class solidarity was cemented.

While Homestead was a solidly working-class town, that does not mean that it did not fall victim to the same discrimination found in the hierarchies of whiteness stemming from Herrenvolk. In fact, the concept of Herrenvolk was gaining legitimacy through science. Darwin's concept of survival of the fittest was simply Herrenvolk all wrapped up in a pretty new bow. The AAISW only represented skilled workers, and skilled workers heralded from places in Europe considered to be superior such as Wales and England, while unskilled laborers immigrated from locations considered less desirable such as eastern and southern Europe.⁸³ This delineation in work meant that the Welsh and English immigrants, along with the locally born white laborers,

⁸¹ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker: Workers' Ideology in the Homestead Strike of 1892," 61.

⁸² Irwin M. Marcus, Jennie Bullard, and Rob Moore. "Change and Continuity: Steel Workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania, 1889-1895." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 111, no. 1 (1987), 63.

⁸³Louis C. Martin, "Tin Plate Towns 1890-1910: Local Labor Movements and Workers' Responses to the Crisis in the Steelworkers' Union." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 74, no. 4 (2007), 497.

lived in nicer homes in nicer neighborhoods than did their eastern and southern European counterparts. In fact, a skilled steel mill worker might make as much as \$8.25 a day while an unskilled steelworker might make \$15.00 a week. It also meant that the positions of governance and important social positions were filled with the skilled laborers from Wales and England or locally born white men.⁸⁴ It would be a mistake to not recognize the way that racial capitalism still existed in some elements of life in Homestead because to do so would be to miss the importance of, as Robinson argued, how discrimination was so built into the system that folks did not even realize when they were recreating feudal economic relationships in what was to be a democracy.

The discrimination among white labor which resulted from *Herrenvolk* and was supported by social Darwinism could have been labor's Achilles heel. Capitalists had successfully used a tactic of divide and conquer in past labor disputes, and Carnegie certainly did his best to use internal discrimination to pit skilled steel workers against unskilled steel workers early in the labor disputes which began when he took over Homestead Steel in 1889. Carnegie did not bank on the steelworkers' shared interpretation of Republicanism and shared goals, which bonded skilled and unskilled workers, unionized and non-unionized, foreign, and native born.⁸⁵

IV Case Study: STRIKE!



Pennsylvania State Militia Arriving at Homestead, 1892

⁸⁴ Ibid. 498.

⁸⁵ Schneider "The Citizen Striker: Workers' Ideology in the Homestead Strike of 1892," 51.

[Figure 6: The Pennsylvania State Police (State Militia) arriving at Homestead, 1892]

The 1889 Homestead strike had resulted in a reduction of pay for the steel workers but ended with a mostly favorable three-year contract for labor. By 1892, Carnegie and Frick were ready to take more extreme measures to break the power of the union to reduce their labor costs and increase the wealth of Carnegie Steel. Carnegie Steel was already making record profits, an incredible \$4.5 million just prior to the 1892 Homestead strike.⁸⁶ However, even that impressive sum was not enough for Carnegie and Frick. Frick resented the AAISW's successful attempt to control the amount of steel produced in a day to manage supply and demand to ensure steel would be in high enough demand to command higher wages for the workers. According to Pittsburgh labor historian Charles McCollister, "The skilled production workers at Homestead enjoyed wages significantly higher than at any other mill in the country."⁸⁷ Between Carnegie's business approach of keeping costs low in order to reap high profits and Fisk's statement to Carnegie that, "The mills have never been able to turn out the product they should, owing to being held back by the Amalgamated men," the Carnegie Steel company was ready to take crushing action against the AAISW during the 1892 contract negotiations.⁸⁸ In fact, Carnegie Steel made unmitigated demands of the AAISW workers instead of making suggestions for negotiating new contracts.

The altercation at Homestead began over wages. In mid-June, the Carnegie Steel company proclaimed that they would be reducing the minimum wage paid to its "tonnage men" from \$25 to \$22 per ton of steel billets produced.⁸⁹ Carnegie's reason for the reduction in wages

⁸⁶ David Demarest, "1892 Homestead Strike," *AFL-CIO Press* (2021) 1

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 1.

⁸⁹ Slavish, "working-class Muscle," 343.

was related to technological advances in the industry. Mechanization had increased the amount of steel produced, which resulted in higher wages for the skilled workers. The AAISW argued that the new mechanization technique would be worthless without the skill of the steelworkers who manned the process.⁹⁰ Carnegie's desire to keep his costs low prompted him to attempt to lower labor's wages so he could reap all the financial benefits of mechanization in his mills. Even though Carnegie's father lost his job due to mechanization, which plunged his family into poverty and eventually necessitated a move to another country in hopes of finding work, Carnegie approached his laborers without consideration for their financial needs. Given that unions had been established to ensure that workers never fell victim to, "an insidious form of wage slavery," the AAISW prepared its members for the potential of a strike.⁹¹ The question of how wealth would fairly be distributed among citizens in a democracy again took center stage.

Homestead strikers explained their goal in terms of industrial citizenship. Claiming that, "those rights which are the principles of organized labor and which are inseparable from their citizenship" the Amalgamated members linked the cause of unionism with their rights as citizens in a democracy. What began as an issue over wages quickly transformed into a battle over independence, liberty, and citizenship. The Amalgamated Advisory Committee released a statement to the trade unions of the United States, which urgently appealed to its members to understand that Carnegie's efforts in Homestead were "a matter of vital importance, not alone to us, but one which threatens, if successful, to undermine every trade organization in the United States and reduce us to the system of serfdom which was the lot of our fathers in the middle ages."⁹² The Vice President of the Amalgamated Association presented the same concept in

⁹⁰ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker," 47.

⁹¹ Slavish, "Working-Class Muscle," 342.

⁹² Schneider, "The Citizen Striker," 52-53.

terms every United States citizen would intimately understand: slavery. Whether a capitalist in need of free labor, an immigrant who fled serfdom under feudal hierarchies in Europe, an enslaved black laborer suffering from the slave system, or a native born poor white laborer fighting against becoming a wage slave after having been raised with the horrors and humiliation of the slave system, no American was untouched by slavery. Racial capitalism requires that something give, and that something has historically proven to be the economic rights of labor.

To force a strike, Frick had a wall topped with barbed wire built around the Homestead mill and sent guards to intimidate the workers. This move offended the unskilled workers who were not part of the Amalgamated Association. In a meeting in which the AAISW members were not allowed to attend, unskilled labor determined that they would support the skilled workers in a strike because armed guards in the mill were, “an injustice to the mechanical department and day laborers and an insult to their manhood to ask them to work under guard, as we believe that in this free land, all men should be free.”⁹³ The sight of armed guards in the workplace harkened the chain gang to mind. Only enslaved or imprisoned men, men who had no freedom, worked under the watchful eye of armed guards. Frick gravely miscalculated how the unskilled laborers in Homestead would perceive the armed guards and only ended up giving the two usually separate groups common ground on which to organize a massive strike.

As they did in 1889, the citizens of Homestead pulled together to present a united front against capital. Here we find a defining difference between white laborers in Homestead and white itinerant laborers in Los Angeles: a union’s ability to create economic stability for white laborers through collective bargaining. Most Amalgamated members in Homestead were homeowners, or in the process of paying off their homes. For them, losing employment meant

⁹³ Ibid. P. 52

losing the economic means to keep their homes, which meant losing their political power as citizens in a democracy. The Amalgamated members working in Homestead knew, “from personal experience that their organization was the only thing, in the first place, that enabled them to accumulate sufficient [wealth] to build homes.”⁹⁴ In fact, John Commons wrote that because historically workers had no market power because individuals could not get word out to the public about their plight, so unions were a market response to prison labor. Commons called prison labor just one of the many, “competitive menaces led to competition for lower costs, lower wages, and worsening employment conditions.”⁹⁵ The AAISW was the thin line between the fulfillment of economic achievement which leads to liberty, independence, and political rights inherent in the industrial workers definition of Republicanism and the condition of wage slavery experienced by the itinerant workers in Los Angeles.

The strike in Homestead was “emblematic of an entire age of transition in America.”⁹⁶ While steelworkers, along with other industrial workers, across the country were wrestling with the same questions new technology posed regarding how technological advances and democratic principles can coexist, the workers in Homestead had a distinct advantage in attempting to answer those questions in favor of labor and democracy. In Pittsburgh, labor was unable to gain strong union support because Carnegie was able to successfully use the courts to quash any labor uprising.⁹⁷ In contrast, as previously mentioned, Carnegie had paid no attention to the social, economic, or political structure of Homestead as it was established. Having decided not to enmesh himself in the establishment of Homestead, Carnegie left the door open to the creation of

⁹⁴ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker," P. 59.

⁹⁵ Harry C. Katz, Alexander J. S. Colvin, and Thomas A. Kochan, “An Introduction to U.S. Collective Bargaining and Labor Relations.” Fifth ed. *Cornell University Press*, (2017).23

⁹⁶ Slavish "Working-Class Muscle," 6.

⁹⁷ Demarest, “1892 Homestead Strike.”, 1.

a working-class town bonded through shared ideals of industrial citizenship. In fact, Union leader Hugh O'Donnell explanation of the Amalgamated members desire to solve this new labor dispute through collective bargaining as they had in the past when he stated, "Our interests are like Mr. Carnegie's here; our homes, our families are here also, and only the presence of unfriendly invaders will force us into a defense position,"⁹⁸ was emblematic of the Amalgamated members belief that collective bargaining through unions was the appropriate and accepted way to settle labor disputes.

One would imagine that Carnegie would have some empathy for this position given his childhood experience. However, racial capitalism has no middle ground. Carnegie had to decide if he was the man who understood the importance of unions to the working man, or if he was the man who desired an end to the entity which threatened his ability to continue amassing staggering amounts of money. Henry Clay Frick was the major determining factor in Carnegie's final choice. Frick, renowned for the harsh methods he used to break up coal miner's unions, approached the Homestead strike with the same oppressive tactics which had served him well in the past.⁹⁹ Uttering words he would later grow to regret, Carnegie wrote Frick from England and told Frick that if the union refused his terms, Carnegie instructed him to shut down the plant and wait until the workers buckled, "We... approve of anything you do," Carnegie wrote from England a statement that would later haunt him, "We are with you to the end."¹⁰⁰ Little did Carnegie know that bloodshed would result from Frick's heavy handed tactics.

Carnegie and Frick's first attempt to browbeat the Amalgamated men into accepting lower wages and longer days was a classic tactic inherent in racial capitalism. Carnegie and Frick

⁹⁸ Schneider, "The Citizen Strike", 59.

⁹⁹ Anonymous, "The Strike at Homestead Mill." *PBS, Public Broadcasting Service*, (2020), 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 1.

agreed to contracts for eight of their twelve mills while simultaneously offering unacceptable terms for new contracts to the other four mills.¹⁰¹ Historically, capital has been able to maintain its hold on power through a divide and conquer tactic. However, Homestead was no normal town. In fact, Homestead Steel was the only one of Carnegie's works to ever strike with a work stoppage.¹⁰² Even though the Amalgamated only had 800 members of the 4,200 workers in Homestead, 3,000 men attended a mass meeting at the Amalgamated lodges and agreed to strike.¹⁰³ As they did in 1889, the town closed ranks and prepared to fight as a united front. While union leaders substituted the local government in Homestead with a union advisory committee to provide leadership and guidance. The chairmen of the strike committee were Hugh O'Donnell, a skilled roller in the Homestead mill, and John McLuckie, an assistant roller in the plate mill, an Amalgamated member, and the Burgess of Homestead.¹⁰⁴



John McLuckie



Hugh O'Donnell

[Figure 7: John McLuckie and Hugh O'Donnell circa 1892]

As Burgess (mayor) of Homestead, O'Donnell was using the same tactic of controlling the means of governance, which industrialists like Carnegie used, but this time the tactic was being used to expand economic freedom in a democracy as opposed to used to limit economic freedom.

¹⁰¹ Schneider, "The Citizen Strike," 50.

¹⁰² <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/250226>

¹⁰³ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker", P. 50.

¹⁰⁴ "The Battle Narrative in PDF." *The Battle of Homestead Foundation*, (25 Jan. 2017)1.

Another significant difference in Homestead was that while the advisory committee took measures to wall off Homestead to all outsiders, the petit bourgeois group of business owners supported the strikers: landlords forgave rent, grocery stores gave families free groceries, and other businesses offered their support if needed.¹⁰⁵ Both sides were poised for battle.

As tensions mounted in Homestead, the establishment press arrived to cover the story for a captivated country. The rhetoric used by the establishment press used the common language of racial capitalism to describe what was happening in Homestead. As was shown in the way the carceral system was effectively used to both restrict the movements of white itinerant laborers and extort their labor for the financial benefit of the local capitalists in Los Angeles, the media coverage of Homestead revealed the common expectation of the era was that poor white laborers were under the authority of the bourgeoisie class. Labor historian and educator, Edward Slavish, explains that the media was shocked to see, “large groups of working-class people moving in and around Homestead.”¹⁰⁶ Middle class Americans were unaccustomed to seeing working-class people due to racial capitalism’s tendency to use either isolation in specified neighborhoods or to completely remove them from society through the carceral system. The unfamiliar sight of unskilled laborers from undesirable parts of Europe, especially in a combative context, generated fear and confusion in the mind of the middle class, which the media exacerbated by describing the workers in terms that, “stressed the savage, animal nature of the group.”¹⁰⁷ By tapping into the fear many middle-class American felt regarding immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, the press was swaying public opinion in favor of Carnegie and Frick.

¹⁰⁵ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker," 54.

¹⁰⁶ Slavish, "working-class Muscle."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 343.

Americans had little understanding of the conditions steelworkers faced at work because such stories were not commonly carried in established press publications.¹⁰⁸ Without the knowledge of the danger and unhealthy working conditions within a steel mill, middle class Americans lacked the understanding and empathy necessary to see through the bias of the mainstream media. Mechanization would give the impression that the job steelworkers performed became easier. However, while physical labor may have been reduced, “in almost every case where this is true responsibility has become heavier. The hot strain on back and muscles has been eased only to make way, often for increased nervous strain.”¹⁰⁹ As the workers argued, the machines could not perform any task without their skill guiding the process and risk to their lives. Even with mechanization, steel workers still faced the possibility of being, “scalded, flash burned, splattered by molten metal, even incinerated in the metal itself.”¹¹⁰

Added to the general ignorance regarding factory conditions of the average middle class American, was the media’s divisive coverage of skilled versus unskilled workers actions during the battle of Homestead. Media coverage impaired the worker’s ability to get their actual message out because there were far more unskilled laborers than skilled laborers in Homestead, and the media drew a link between ethnicity and disorder.¹¹¹ The establishment media rhetoric emphasizing the unskilled laborers as immigrants who were unable to adapt to the American way of life led to a critical misunderstanding regarding the laborer’s perspective on violence. In contrast, the *National Labor Tribune*, the voice of the Pittsburgh labor movement, reported that labor was in fact defending American democracy. One correspondent for the *Tribune* wrote, “the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 344.

¹⁰⁹ Ahmed White, “The Last Great Strike: Little Steel, the CIO, and the Struggle for Labor Rights in the New Deal.” *University of California Press*. 34. (2016.) 32

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 36.

¹¹¹ Slavish "Working-Class Muscle," 340.

lockout originated with a determination to tie the hands of the laboring men of this great, free American country and make a degraded slave with loss of his liberty as a free citizen and voter.”¹¹² The disconnect for the public was due to the limited distribution of a publication aimed at labor and not the American middle class. Due to the divided media representation, it is doubtful that the actual perspective of the Amalgamated men and the unskilled laborers would make its way to the average middle class American without having the laborers’ perspective twisted.

In truth, the industrial citizenship to which the steelworkers ascribed contained a deep respect for legitimate law enforcement and for elected government officials. That is not the story that was told by the mainstream media. On July 5 when sheriff’s deputies arrived in Homestead, they were escorted to union headquarters by AAISW officials. The *Dispatch* reported the large group of working-class men as an entity with, “its own sense of coordination and its own pulse. The crowd surged and swayed, carried along not by rational thought but by the certainty of its own physical power.”¹¹³ The *Dispatch* was not objectively telling the story of what was happening, but instead was telling the story unfolding before them from a place of fear of the display of the laboring classes’ united power. The AAISW did not believe in harming legitimate law enforcement because they were representatives of the people, thus they would not have used physical power against the sheriff’s deputies.

The establishment media did further damage to the AAISW’s cause through discriminatory language when it reported the moment the men of Homestead took down the wall Frick had put up around the steel mill. The members of the Amalgamated were normal men because they were either British or native-born whites, but they were also the minority. When the

¹¹² Schneider, "The Citizen Striker," P. 54.

¹¹³ Slavish, "working-class Muscle," 347.

united group of laborers moved together to take down the fence, the media used descriptors saved for immigrants believed to be inferior to the AAISW members. Having previously described the unskilled laborers as people who could not adapt to the American way of life, they now said these men reverted to, “the customs, habits, and beliefs of our barbarous progenitors.”¹¹⁴ A writer for the *The World*, built on the stereotype of savage men from an untamed land descending into barbarity when he said the men, “ran like wild men” over the downturned fence.¹¹⁵ By the time the Pinkerton men arrived, the American middle class had been primed to see the Homestead strikers as a violent mob bent on using violence against their employer to achieve their goals.

The Pinkerton men were afforded no respect from any of the steelworkers. To the Homestead steelworkers the Pinkertons were nothing more than paid mercenaries which the *Homestead Local News* described as, “not ...the lawful authorities, but with the hired forces of a great corporation.”¹¹⁶ The AAISW and the unskilled laborers participating in the strike differentiated between legitimate law enforcement and the Pinkertons, so their approach to both parties was different. The press did not acknowledge the difference, which made the battle that occurred between the Pinkerton men and the laborers appear to be an extension of the treatment given to the sheriff’s deputies which was more violent not because of the way the laborers perceived the Pinkerton’s, but because they had descended further into barbarity as time went on. When the laborers forced the Pinkerton men to walk a gauntlet to the union headquarters instead of being escorted the way the sheriffs had been, the media did not report it as a difference in tactic based on beliefs, but as a decline into “biological primitivism.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 350.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 351.

¹¹⁶ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker", P. 55.

¹¹⁷ Slavish, "working-class Muscle," 352.

The gauntlet linked the Homestead laborers to the indigenous in California. In the nineteenth century, tales of adventure had popularized the gauntlet as a “brutal Native American torture device.”¹¹⁸ When mainstream media outlets published pictures of bloodied and battered Pinkertons walking the gauntlet in Homestead, the scene became, “shorthand for working-class savagery.”¹¹⁹ It was this scene which the industrialists attached to the Homestead strike to define it as a battle between beasts and men.

In stark contrast to the judgement of the laborers regarding the Pinkerton men, the steelworkers, “saw the government as a neutral force, not allied with any class, which acted to safeguard the interests of all people.”¹²⁰ Perhaps because Homestead had been established free of capitalists, the steelworkers did not understand that the police work in the service of the wealthy. Racial capitalism was diminished in Homestead because of the working-class structure of the town, which seems to have prevented the steelworkers from fully understanding the relationship between the industrialists and the means of governance. This failure to comprehend the connection between racial capitalism and policing was the laborers Achilles heel. Justifying violence against the Pinkerton men had been easy but justifying violence against constitutional law enforcement was something the laborers could not do because, “They argued that the militia represented the people of Pennsylvania and could not be treated as enemies. If treated as friends, they could not bring harm to the strike.”¹²¹ Unfortunately, the laborers' respect for government as an authorized representative of the people, “led directly to their defeat.”¹²² It was only after the

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 357.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 357.

¹²⁰ Schneider, "The Citizen Striker," P. 64.

¹²¹ Ibid. 64.

¹²² Ibid. 65

strike ended that the link between government and industrialists became fully clear to the strikers.

V. Conclusion

The state of Pennsylvania not only intervened in the strike on the side of Carnegie and the industrialists instead of being neutral as the working-class laborers of the Homestead steel mills anticipated, but it also punished the men for daring to challenge capital in the first place. The organizers of the strike were charged with treason and various other crimes.¹²³ Treason: to use overt acts to overthrow the government or the sovereign. While other charges of murder and lesser crimes were levied against 160 men who participated in the strike, it is treason that is the most telling in the context of racial capitalism. The steelworkers of Homestead did not strike against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania nor the United States of America; they went on strike against the Carnegie Company. The charge of treason reveals the belief that Carnegie, as an industrialist, was part of the government, and as such, could not be challenged by labor. Immigrant working-class workers' only use to capitalists such as Carnegie was to be cheap labor for the bourgeois to make vast sums of money. Carnegie did not view the steelworkers in his mills as citizens of a democracy with economic, social, or political rights. Racial capitalism conflicts with the very concept of democracy, and when the two ideals come in conflict, it is capitalism that wins. By owning the means of governance and using policing as a mechanism of upholding capitalism, industrialists such as Carnegie ensured that democracy remained limited for the working-class.

¹²³ Thomas C. Buchanan "Class Sentiments: Putting the Emotion Back in Working-Class History." *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 1 (2014): 82.

Although sympathetic juries did not convict the leaders of the Homestead strike with treason, the AAISW was ruined.¹²⁴ With the passing of the unions came the brutal reality of the wage slavery the steelworkers so feared. Unions had been the collective voice with which working-class labor fought for their economic, social, and political lives. Without the means of having their voices heard, without the means of collective bargaining, and without the means of protecting the value of their labor against forces such as prison labor, the working-class was reduced to the dependent status which allows capitalists to make laws and regulations that keep the working-classes' wages low and subject to social isolation through incarceration. After the Homestead strike, working-class workers in the east were in the very same position itinerant workers had been in from the beginning in California. The ideals of protection through the collective had been destroyed among the working-class as it had been among the indigenous in California.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

¹²⁴Anonymous, "The Strike at Homestead Mill." *PBS, Public Broadcasting Service*, (2020), 1.

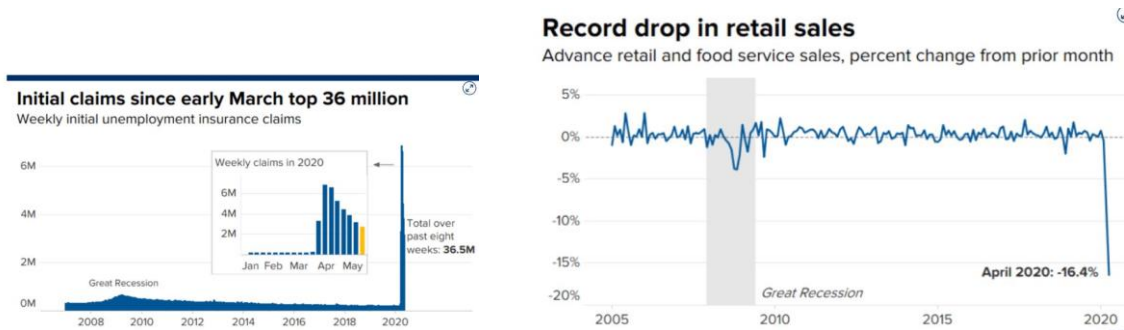
America is again experiencing a time of social, economic, and political upheaval. Today, Poor white laborers face the very same questions they faced during the Industrial Revolution. How does a poor white laborer break into a quickly changing economy? How do poor white laborers protect their wages in an era of mass incarceration, which provides the free labor necessary for capitalists to continue to accrue vast amounts of wealth? How does a poor white laborer avoid the pitfalls of policing that is intended to protect the rich and isolate the poor? Looking to the past and analyzing the experiences of itinerant workers in Los Angeles, California, and unionized steelworkers from Homestead, Pennsylvania, offers a roadmap which includes abolishing policing and mass incarceration while also reviving the protections offered by trade unions.

Faced with daily headlines that focus on increasing income disparity, high rates of unemployment, and racially-based civil rights protests, Americans have a flurry of problems to resolve. The answer to the question about which Americans have a say in how the current social, political, and economic problems has never changed: the capitalist class continues to make all these decisions and white privilege continues to handicap the ability for poor white laborers and poor black laborers to work together for common labor rights. Historically, unions have been associated with the white working and middle class. However, since the death of unions as they were constructed during the era of the Homestead Strike, middle class whites have all but disappeared, and the poor white working-class has lost any power it once had to have any impact on their wages or working environments. Now, union organizing is being seen primarily among black and brown workers. Whether a working-class laborer in Alabama or an engineer in California, black and brown laborers are engaging unions as both a market and civil rights response.

As a historic Union vote takes place in Bessemer, Alabama, Americans are again debating the place of unions in the American economy. The global Covid-19 pandemic revealed poor working conditions at Amazon. Amazon.com Inc. is an American technology company, which focuses on e-commerce and digital streaming, among others. It is one of the wealthiest and best-known companies in the United States. During the pandemic, Amazon workers were deemed “essential” workers (necessary to keep the country functioning), which placed them at an increased risk of contracting the often-deadly Covid-19 Coronavirus. According to Michael Santinos’ article in the Guardian, “The risks posed by Covid-19 often worsened working conditions and heightened concerns about safety protections in places like Amazon warehouses that not only continued operating, but saw surges in demand and profits.” Workers were asked to work more and harder, yet their wages were never increased. Amazon warehouse employees began to freely discuss the, “grueling nature of the work, whether it be the pace and performance quotas, or roles that have at times necessitated walking a dozen miles or more a day across the warehouse floor.”¹²⁵ Like the white Homestead steelworkers before them, working-class laborers at Amazon are demanding safer working conditions, their rights to full benefits of American citizenship, and a living wage which reflects their contribution to the financial success of Amazon.com Inc. The difference now is that the labor organizers are black men.

Amazon workers had little choice but to tolerate the working conditions when the Covid-19 virus brought the global pandemic to America, unemployment reached incredible heights. The economic floor fell out for most working-class American in April of 2020.

¹²⁵ Jason Delray, “The Results of Amazon’s Historic Union Vote are Days Away.” *Vox* (March 31, 2021) 1.

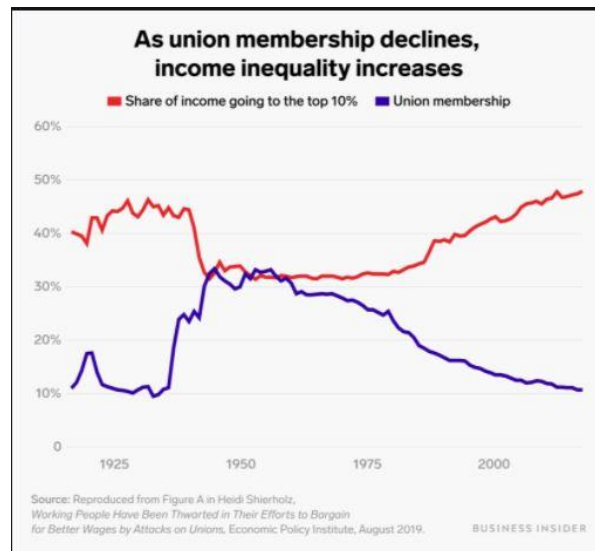


[Figure 8: Unemployment Rates April 2020 and Retail Sales Unemployment April 2020]

It is true that jobs were lost among the upper-middle class, but it was the poor laborer who was hit the hardest. The service industry (restaurant work, hotel employees, and retail sales positions), construction, and manufacturing jobs, which are the economic life blood of poor, white laborers were the first to go and are proving to be the last to return. After the power of the unions from the industrial revolution collapsed, so did union membership. Collective bargaining power for the white laborer has been all but lost. With it went the economic, social, and political power accessible to poor white labor. However, in their place, the working-class black laborer became the basis of most unions. The civil rights movement of the 1960's had as much of an effect on the definition of collective bargaining and union membership as it did other American institutions. The racial tables have turned where union membership is concerned. working-class black labor, once banned from union membership, now makes up a large part of the union rolls. Thus, when the economic downturn hit, the average working-class white laborer had no safeguard for their employment and no powerful voice to make their plight known.

According to the Labor Department, the downturn in union membership indicated by the chart below continued to decline to its current membership of 10.8% of

American workers.¹²⁶ The income disparity continued as well. The richest capitalists in America



[Figure 9: Chart depicting the relationship between unions and wage gaps between labor and capital] actually became richer during the economic downturn that began in April 2020. While unemployment hit near Great Depression levels among America’s working-class laborers, the top wealthiest capitalists such as Jeff Bezos, founder and owner of Amazon.com Inc., accumulated mass amounts of wealth. While food lines in America’s working-class neighborhoods got longer and longer, Jeff Bezos' fortune grew 63%, thanks to the 72.7 billion dollars that he added to his 116-billion-dollar fortune during the 2020 pandemic. In fact, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index , 0.001% of the population benefited during the health crisis. This year, the world's 500 richest people added \$ 1.8 trillion to their combined net worth and are now valued at \$ 7.6 trillion.¹²⁷ It seems clear that a crucial part of any plan for poor, white laborers to reclaim a fair chance at economic, social, and political equality must

¹²⁶ United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union Members Summary, January 22, 2021.

¹²⁷ Entrepreneur Staff, “Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk Broke Wealth Records in 2020.” *Entrepreneur Magazine* (2021), 1.

include a return to unions and the creation of an equal relationship with the poor black laborer who shares his interests.

Tied to the issue of unions is policing. Possibly more than any other time in American history, Americans saw first-hand the real job of the police in society: uphold the paternalistic, white supremacist nature of racial capitalism. As Rajshahi Muthukumar's story reveals, the issue of policing is still tied to the capitalist class. Muthukumar, having sent an email which named organizations collecting bail money for Black Lives Matter members who were arrested during protests after the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer was called to Human Resources and warned not to send any political emails through Google's official email. Even though Muthukumar is a well-paid Google executive, she was silenced when attempting to challenge police actions. Alex Vitale explains how Muthukumar's story may have modern social problems at its root, her experience with the capitalist classes protection of the police was the same, "therefore, while the specific forms that policing takes have changed as the nature of inequality and the forms of resistance to it have shifted over time, the basic function of managing the poor, foreign, and nonwhite on behalf of a system of economic and political inequality remains."¹²⁸ Not even a well-paid executive for a powerful technology company was permitted to question the police's tactics because the police are meant to protect the power and wealth of the technology company. Clearly, Google was not going to allow an employee to fight the system keeping it in its position of control of the means of governance. To have a voice, Muthukumar became a union organizer.

If nothing else brought home the truth about the police's role in society, it was the attempted coup attempt at the nation's capital on January 6, 2021. Black Lives Matter (BLM)

¹²⁸ Vitale, *The End of Policing*, 225.

protests were held in almost every American city from the moment of George Floyd's death, through the summer, and many protests continue still. The BLM protestors were met with extreme police response in every city. Nightly curfews were placed in most cities to force the BLM protestors to end their First Amendment right to peaceful protest before dark, and to seemingly give the police a reason to begin a violent assault on primarily peaceful protestors.¹²⁹ Protestors gathered to advocate for racial equality found themselves shot with rubber bullets, beaten with police batons, choked by tear gas, and temporarily deafened by flash bombs thrown into the peaceful crowd as soon as the clock hit curfew time. The majority of American watched with a mixture of confusion, fear, and outrage as peaceful protests turned violent due to the police's actions.

Conversely, when a mostly white crowd stormed the nation's capital on January 6, 2021, while the entire presidential succession was gathered in the Senate to certify the Electoral College votes, at what many believed was the request of the President of the United States, attacked the few police officers present, and desecrated public property, law enforcement was disturbingly absent. The following arrangement of pictures represent the disparity in policing practices so succinctly that they remove the need for words. The photographs on the left side of the arrangement are from a Black Lives Matter protest held in Washington, D.C. on June 2, 2020. The photographs situated on the right side of the arrangement show the January 6, 2021 coup attempt on the Congressional building. An important fact to know before viewing the photos is that the BLM protests had been nonviolent except for police tactics, but law enforcement had advanced notice that violence was likely on January 6.

¹²⁹Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman, "This Summer's Black Lives Matter Protesters Were Overwhelmingly Peaceful, Our Research Finds." *The Washington Post* (Oct. 16, 2020), 1.



[Figure 10: photographs depicting the disparity in treatment between Black American citizens and white American citizens. White privilege allows white Americans to engage with the police in a vastly different way than Black Americans.]

The first protestors arrived at the capitol at 12:40 pm. The call for help for the Capitol Police was sent out by the Chief of the Capitol Police at 1:26 pm. Coup attempt rioters breached the Capitol building at 2:09 pm causing members of the Senate and House to first be locked down in place and then evacuated. The authorization for help from the National Guard was not given until 3:19 pm. Because the order to mobilize the National Guard was given so late, the National Guard did not reach the capitol until 5:40 pm. By that time, one woman had been shot by police inside the capitol building, another woman had been trampled to death by the crowd surging into the breached capitol building, a man had died from a fall, and a police officer had received blow to the head that would cause his death later that night.

Not one person who invaded the capitol building was arrested at the capitol that day.

Later in the evening, 52 people were arrested for various offenses on January 6, 2021. In stark contrast, 427 people were arrested at the Black Lives Matter protest in D.C. between May 30 and June 2, 2020. The group of white Americans that initially invaded the capitol building did

so to take elected representatives hostage, stage a kangaroo court, and assassinate democratic elected representatives. Once the democratic representatives were eliminated, the Electoral College votes would be destroyed, and Donald Trump would be instated as President of the United States against the will of the American people. The disparity of treatment between white seditionists and black and brown protestors leads poor white to believe that they are part of the group of white Americans who own the means of governance and control the economy and society through those structures. In short, it solidifies their belief that their economic, social, and political freedom is founded in white supremacy. All the white people who stormed the capitol building out of a zeal for “making America great again,” were affected by white privilege. The wealthy among them felt entitled to the means of governance and the poor whites among them fancied themselves part of the greater cause of white supremacy without understanding that they would never benefit from it. In fact, almost every seditionist arrested after the coup attempt said they believed that Trump wanted them to fight for him, and in return, they would either avoid charges or be pardoned. In television interview after television interview, the most infamous of the seditionists practically bragged that they would not see a day in jail for their participation in the January 6 coup attempt. They genuinely believed that Trump would help them. It was not until Trump left the presidency without pardoning, or advocating the freedom of a single seditionist, that the poor white people who had stormed the capitol realized that they were not actually considered equal to the capitalist class to which Trump belongs based on their shared white skin. Herrenvolk is not dead.

As the poor white itinerant laborers during the industrial revolution learned, the poor, white working-class rioters are learning the hard way--they do not have equal access to economic equality, social privileges, nor political rights that belong to the white capitalist class. The

modern white working-class American worker is feeling first-hand the same fear the steelworkers in Homestead, Pennsylvania felt when they realized their economic power, which led to their civic power, was endangered. Without the protection of a union, all free labor will be reduced to the status of slave labor. The way forward is through rebuilding-rebuilding unions based on a redefined definition of collective bargaining and a change in focus from race to class.

However, before we can rebuild, we must demolish policing to lay bare the dangers racial capitalism poses to poor white Americans and their families. If poor white Americans can learn from the ways the poor seditionists were immediately abandoned by Trump as soon as they were useless to him, they can choose to be part of the dismantling of policing and racial capitalism. The combination of working-class black and brown Americans and working-class, white Americans would completely topple the current structure of racial capitalism. The power to restructure the economic, social, and political structures in a way that would financially benefit them and black and brown Americans is an opportunity that poor, white Americans have been given in the past. And missed. My goal in writing this thesis is to add to the growing work of historical analysis of the effect of policing and racial capitalism on the poorest white Americans, in the hopes that it might inspire poor white Americans to see the benefits of collective organizing: personally, as social justice partners and politically as union allies fighting for a fair chance at economic opportunity, social equality, and political agency.

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