

# The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

An Instructional Packet  
for teachers and Students  
of  
Labor History  
in  
New York and the United States of America

Using Newspaper Accounts  
From  
***The Albany Argus (1877)***  
&  
***Buffalo Morning Express (1892)***

Developed and Prepared  
by  
The New York Newspaper Project

**New York State Education Department  
New York State Library  
Cultural Education Center  
Albany, New York**

Originally created 2001  
Reviewed and posted online 2007

---

These materials are dedicated to the memory of Debra Bernhardt, "a historian for the unsung."

These instructional materials were made possible by a grant from the New York State Legislature thanks to the efforts of Assemblyman John J. McEneny.

# The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

## Instructional Packet

### Table of Contents

1. Notes for Educators: About this packet
2. Correlation with NYS Curricula and Learning Standards
3. Historical Background of the Great Strike of 1877
4. Additional Resources for Teachers and Students
5. Student Activities
  - Getting Started: Vocabulary for the study of labor history
  - Student Activity One: Comparing Primary & Secondary Sources
  - Student Activity Two: Guided Reading #1
  - Student Activity Three: Constructed Response Question #1
  - Student Activity Four: Constructed Response Question #2
  - Student Activity Five: Whose Rights? Who's Right? (Determining Points of View)
  - Student Activity Six: DBQ: The Effects of Labor Conflict on Everyday Life
  - Student Activity Seven: Guided Reading #2: Comparing the Homestead Strike with the Great Strike of 1877
6. Documents (*Select documents correlating with Student Activities from the separate file of newspaper articles and transcriptions.*)
7. About the NYS Newspaper Project and the Friends of the NYS Newspaper Project
8. About the Author

# About This Packet

## Notes for Educators

This instructional packet uses newspaper articles from the nineteenth century to create a case study of a significant event in American labor history, the Railroad Strike of 1877, frequently referred to as the Great Strike. By using newspapers written and published at the time events occur, readers experience the emotion and the events as they unfold, without the filter of time and changing perspective. And, since they were written to be read by a wide variety of citizenry possessing varying levels of literacy, newspapers of any period provide classrooms with documents that may be more accessible to students than legislation, speeches and other textual primary sources.

### Who Can Use This Packet?

The packet is designed for teachers and students of New York State and American history, and those wishing to learn more about the beginnings of organized labor in the United States. It may be used by teachers of middle school students in grade 8, high school students in grade 11, or resource and academic intervention programs. A correlation of the activities in this packet with the New York State Learning Standards and Performance Indicators for the Intermediate and Commencement Levels follows these Notes.

The packet may also find utility at the college level. Because it is a case study, students of labor history will find material to support secondary sources, and to begin their own primary research. Because it is an instructional packet, professors of methodology and students preparing for careers in social studies and/or English education can analyze the materials and activities for pedagogical construction and their implementation of NYS Standards. Additionally, supplemental or parallel activities using the documents can be developed as a practical application of educational theory.

### About the Articles

The majority of editorials and articles were selected for this packet based on several criteria. *The Albany Argus* was an influential newspaper published in the last half of the nineteenth century in Albany, New York. As such, it is frequently cited in fiction and non-fiction writing about the period, and is available to students and teachers through the New York State Library and the Albany County Public Library system on microfilm. More information may be obtained by referencing *The Albany Argus* for July 16, 1877 - August 5, 1877, or other newspapers published during that period.

The specific articles themselves can each stand alone, either providing an overview or particular viewpoint regarding the strike, or information to broaden an understanding of the topic and its importance at the local and regional level. The articles are in transcription, keeping the original spellings and punctuation, to facilitate student reading. Please note that spelling and punctuation are inconsistent across articles, or incorrect by today's standards. Spelling and punctuation were not standardized in print media until the early 1900s.

The packet contains more articles than are used in the student activities; they offer additional background information and details, and may or may not be used in the classroom, as the teacher deems appropriate. The articles are all textual in nature. Newspapers did not publish photographs or illustrations on a regular basis from Monday through Saturday. These features were reserved for Sunday editions, and then usually only focused on society events and doyens. (*The Albany Argus* did not publish a Sunday edition.) Visuals and non-text materials concerning labor history may be found on the Internet or in other sources; a list of related resources is at the end of this packet.

The last article in the packet is from *The Buffalo Morning Express* (July 16, 1892). It was found serendipitously and is a researcher's dream: an interview with the leader of the Railroad Strike of 1877 fifteen years after the fact, at the beginning of the Homestead Steel Strike in 1892. Not only does it

provide a concise overview of the 1877 event; it contrasts the goals and actions of laborers in 1877 with those of 1892 from the perspective of one who was there. It was too useful and too rich to leave out.

## Student Activities

The activities were created as instructional materials; students will learn the topic and develop research/reading skills as they proceed through the activities. Therefore, the use of class instruction and notes, texts, reference materials and other resources is necessary to complete the activities.

Teachers are encouraged to determine point allocations for various activities prior to distributing the assignment to students. This allows teachers to weight some items more heavily than others; employ letter grades for more interpretive items; and assign some items as individual work, group work, class discussion, or challenge activities. Teachers are encouraged to establish their own rubrics or scoring guides, based on their instructional goals and objectives for their students.

The activities are not numbered in sequential order, nor is one designed to be a prerequisite for others. Each activity is self-contained. Teachers can do one or several activities in the packet, dependent upon the ability and skills of their respective classes. Activities such as the guided readings or constructed response questions could be assigned as homework. Writing assignments could be developed in English/language arts classes. Student Activity 5 may be appropriate for Participation in Government or Advanced Placement classes, as classroom discussion in middle school, or as a challenge activity. Student Activity 6 (DBQ) could serve as an introduction to the study of labor history in the nineteenth century, and as an assessment of student research, analysis, and document interpretation.

The Short Answer Worksheet for Student Activity 6 - DBQ (Part A) contains 15 questions. Teachers may allocate credit in a variety of ways. For example, teachers may allocate 2 points for each correct answer on Part A, for a total of 30%, and allocate 70% for the essay (total score: 100%).

## Terminology & Concepts

DBQs and constructed response questions use terminology that may be unfamiliar to teachers and students. Therefore, it is important for teachers to introduce terms and concepts, and frequently use them throughout the academic year. The greater the students' familiarity with the concepts and format, the more successful they will become with the process. What follows are working and simplified definitions of the some concepts important to using documents in the classroom.

- **document:** any map, chart, illustration, graph, photograph, or written material which may be analyzed and interpreted to obtain information. This should not be confused with a *primary source*.
- **primary source:** (1) an official document (e.g. license; legislation; report card); (2) eye or ear witness account (e.g. letters; journal entries; interviews; oral histories), or (3) physical remains (e.g. photographs; clothing; furniture) that provides information about an event or time period and *is from the period*. Primary sources require interpretation by the reader or observer, unlike secondary sources (such as textbooks, encyclopedia articles) which have the interpretation of authors and editors, are written after the fact, and base their information on other sources.
- **evidence:** specific information, such as legislation, events, biographical data, organizations, relevant dates; information and details obtained from the document in question.
- **support:** specific evidence that helps prove a position or point of view.
- **thesis statement:** a statement, proposition or position requiring agreement or disagreement; opinions regarding the thesis statement must be defended with related and supporting evidence taken from documents and/or outside sources (e.g. texts).

# **The Great Railroad Strike of 1877**

## **Correlation of Student Activities with NYS Curricula, Standards and Performance Indicators**

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Instructional focus of this packet**

To illustrate how newspapers can assist students in the analysis, interpretation, and understanding of local events within a national context.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Curricular alignment**

#### **Grade 8 (NYS & US History) - Unit 7: An Industrial Nation**

I: The Maturing of an Industrial Society in the Second Half of the 19th Century

Objectives:

2. To explain how societies and nations attempt to satisfy their basic needs and wants by utilizing scarce capital, natural, and human resources.
4. To understand how scarcity requires people and nations to make choices which involve costs and future considerations.

#### **Grade 11 (US History & Government) - Unit 3: Industrialization in the United States**

II: The Rise of American Business, Industry, and Labor, 1865-1920

F. Labor Unionization

2. Struggle and conflict
  - a. Major strikes: gains and losses
  - b. Management's position
  - c. Weapons or tactics employed in disputes both labor and management
  - d. Attitude and role of government

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Alignment with NYS Standards and Performance Indicators**

**NYS Standard 1:** *Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and NYS.*

#### **Key Ideas and Performance Indicators for Intermediate (I) & Commencement (C) Levels**

1. *The study of NYS and US history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions.*
  - Students will interpret the ideas, values, and beliefs contained in the Declaration of Independence and the NYS Constitution and the US Constitution, Bill of Rights, and other important historical documents. (I)
  - Students will describe the evolution of American democratic values and beliefs as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the NYS Constitution, The United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other important historical documents. (C)

2. *Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from NYS and US history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives.*
  - Students will investigate key turning points in NYS and US history and explain why these events or developments are significant. (I)
  - Students will compare and contrast the experiences of different groups in the United States. (C)
  - Students will develop and test hypotheses about important events, eras, or issues in NYS and United States history, setting clear and valid criteria for judging the importance and significance of these events, eras, or issues. (C)
  
3. *Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in NYS and US history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.*
  - Students will gather and organize information about the important achievements and contributions of individuals and groups living in NYS and the United States. (I)
  - Students will research and analyze the major themes and developments in NYS and United States history (e.g. The American labor movement). (C)
  - Students will prepare essays and oral reports about the important social, political, economic, scientific, technological, and cultural developments, issues, and events from New York State and United States history. (C)
  
4. *The skills of historical analysis include the ability to explain the significance of historical evidence; weigh the importance, reliability, and validity of evidence; understand the concept of multiple causation; understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments.*
  - Students will consider the source of historic documents, narratives, or artifacts and evaluate their reliability. (I)
  - Students will compare and contrast different interpretations of key events and issues in NYS and United States history and explain reasons for these different accounts. (I)
  - Students will describe historic events through the eyes and experiences of those who were there. (I)
  - Students will evaluate the validity and credibility of historical interpretations of important events or issues in New York State or United States history, revising these interpretations as new information is learned and other interpretations are developed. (C)

# The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

## Historical Background

Summer, eighteen hundred seventy seven. The United States officially ended the twelve year period spent "reconstructing" the nation after a divisive war. Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was four months into his hard-won presidency, having lost the popular vote to New York's Governor Samuel Tilden but winning the office thanks to the partisan electoral college. Industrial growth, evident in the North prior to the war, was widespread, changing the economic foundation of the nation and the relationship of the individual to his work for the next century.

As devastating as the War Between the States was for soldiers and civilians, it was remarkably lucrative for entrepreneurs and financiers. The economy boomed with necessary production of goods for both the battlefield and the home front; technological advancements bred further innovation. The steel industry had already benefited from a new manufacturing technique known as the Bessemer process, developed in the 1850s, that used less than one-seventh the amount of coal previously needed. Shipping speed and profits increased due to advancements in water power and steam engines. New York City, a hub of national mercantilism and commerce, became a center for the buying and selling of money itself by the Civil War, housing the notable Stock Exchange of the City of New York. Venerable businessmen Cornelius Vanderbilt and Daniel Drew became even more prosperous, but the future of the country belonged to a younger generation. The robber barons and captains of industry of the last quarter of the nineteenth century were all under forty in 1861: Jay Gould, Jim Fisk, J.P. Morgan, Philip Armour, Andrew Carnegie, James Hill and John Rockefeller were in their early twenties; Collis Huntington and Leland Stanford were over thirty, and Jay Cooke, not yet forty. Their business acumen, willingness to take risks, and downright arrogance resulted in exorbitant, some would say obscene, wealth, much of which was, at this point, plowed back into the businesses to create even more capital. Their power is evident in the panic of Black Friday (September 24, 1869), caused by the efforts of Jim Fisk and Jay Gould to corner the gold market.

Money, technology, greed and a profound lack of government regulation gave rise to new forms of companies and corporations. The first businesses to become really big were the railroads, and regional lines frequently had monopolies over freight transportation and charges. In 1869, freight accounted for \$300 million in railroad earnings. By 1890, the amount more than doubled, to \$734 million. *The Albany Argus* published the train schedules in its daily newspaper. So tied to the vagaries of railroad charges were farmers in the mid-West that they took their concerns to the Supreme Court (*Munn v. Illinois*, 1876).

At the beginning of Ulysses Grant's second term, several Eastern financial institutions ran out of funds as a result of bad loans. The subsequent Panic of 1873 ravaged the nation; banks closed, the stock market temporarily collapsed, and an economic depression affected Americans for approximately five years. Within the first year, 89 railroads (of the 364 then existing) went out of business; their failure left farmers with no means of transporting products, and they too became casualties. The new industrialized economy was so intertwined that a vicious downward cycle began: by 1875, more than 18,000 companies collapsed. With no money and no visible relief on the horizon, Americans took out their frustrations on the available targets: government, corporations, banks, immigrants. Businesses turned to workers.

The change from an agrarian to industrial economy transformed the value of labor. Workers became just another cog in the machinery of business. When profits declined beyond those acceptable to stockholders, it was the worker who received lower wages, or was dismissed. The steady movement of rural dwellers to urban industrial areas and ever-increasing numbers of immigrants provided business owners a constant source of cheap labor, willing to work under the most deplorable of conditions. In the 1870s, workers did not yet organize; when they finally did, their unions were not sanctioned or protected by the federal government until decades later, in the 1930s.

Such was the United States in July, 1877. The Railroad Strike began simply enough, in Martinsburg, West Virginia, on July 16. It became the first massive strike of American workers, and was viewed at the time as rebellion and insurrection. So great was the fear of corporate America that huge, stone armories were constructed around the country to protect the citizenry from a working people's revolt. They remain in many cities today as a reminder of a perceived war on capitalism and "the American way of life." Such is the legacy of The Great Strike of 1877, otherwise referred to as The Great Upheaval.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad cut wages for its workers by 10 per cent on Monday, July 16; it was the second such action in eight months. Confused and angry, the trainmen milled around the yard throughout the day. A crew abandoned work on a cattle train at day's end, and workers refused to replace them. Crowds gathered, uncoupled engines, and refused to continue operation until wages were reinstated. When the mayor arrived to quell the crowds and order the arrest of the leaders, he was jeered and ridiculed. Police were powerless to convince workers to operate the trains, and quickly withdrew.

B&O officials sought help from Governor Henry Matthews, who wired Col. Charles Faulkner, Jr., commander of the Berkeley Light Guard, to gather his troops in support of the rail officials. On Tuesday morning, Faulkner's militiamen, many of whom were railroad workers arrived in Martinsburg. As the cattle train moved out of the station with the militia on board, a striker, William Vandergriff, pulled a switch to derail the train. He shot a soldier who tried to restart the train, and was then shot himself. The engineer and fireman left the train; volunteers refused to answer Faulkner's call to run the train. Faulkner wired the governor that he was unable to control the situation; the crowds and militia were full of strike sympathizers.

What followed was spontaneous combustion. Firemen and rail workers stopped freight traffic along the entire line of the B&O; passenger and mail service went uninterrupted. Seventy engines and six hundred freight cars quickly piled up in the Martinsburg yard. Governor Matthews, determined to break the strike, sent in Light Guards from Wheeling; they too sided with the strikers, and they were moved from the rail yard to the courthouse. The people of Martinsburg were resolute in their support of the workers. The strikers, it would seem, were successful; order was restored.

However, B&O officials wired Washington, D.C. to request the employment of the U.S. Army, even suggesting that the Secretary of War be apprised of the situation. Faulkner wired Governor Matthews that a "bloody conflict" incited by railroad workers would prove too much for his small militia; the governor in turn, backed by an appeal from B&O president, wired President Hayes for help.

As the strike spread along the web of rail lines, the pattern remained the same: workers react to the pay cuts with a work stoppage; officials attempt to run the trains with militia and volunteers; attempts are abandoned due to popular support of the rail workers.

Wage cuts began earlier, June first, on the Pennsylvania Railroad; the Brotherhood of Engineers, Conductors and Firemen did nothing to protect its members, and workers took matters into their own hands. But wages were not the only working conditions at issue on railroads. Workers disapproved of the "first crew in, first crew out" system, which left workers no rest or family time. The length of the work day was calculated by miles rather than hours, and that mileage more than doubled. Runs were irregular, thereby making wages and work schedules erratic. No overtime pay was granted; reduction in crews meant longer hours, harder work handling extra cars.

Railroad brotherhoods, organized to assist workers in reaching their goals, were ineffectual; delegates were intimidated by rail officials and frequently capitulated to owners' demands without consulting the rank-and-file. And unions were full of spies, spreading word of work stoppages to company officials, who would in turn fire potential strike committee members. This panic would lead committee leaders to deny reports of impending strikes or work actions, leaving locals devoid of union leadership and direction. The Great Upheaval was the result of independent initiatives up and down the rails.

Three hundred federal troops entered Martinsburg on July 19; the workers in Martinsburg were supplanted in their efforts by strikebreakers from Baltimore, who began running the trains under military control. Just when it appeared as though the strike was indeed broken, railroad workers received support from wide-ranging sources: striking boatmen on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal; miners from Piedmont, West Virginia; boatmen, migrant workers, and young boys at Cumberland, Maryland. The president of the B&O, recognizing the possible extent of the strike, urged Maryland Governor John Carroll to call up the National Guard. Again, met by large numbers of labor sympathizers, the militia was driven back; Governor Carroll wired President Hayes for the U.S. Army.

During the same week, the Pennsylvania Railroad ordered a change in the operation of all freights running eastward from Pittsburgh, resulting in more work and increased danger of accidents and layoffs. Again, crew members independently refused to obey orders. Word of the strike spread quickly, and so did the arrival of militia.

On Sunday, July 22, militia dispersed an angry crowd with threats of gunfire in Buffalo, New York; on Monday, the crowd returned armed, pushed aside the militia, and forced the closing of the Erie roundhouse. By that evening, all major railroads abandoned attempts at moving anything but local passenger trains out of Buffalo.

Strike actions took place in sympathy around the nation: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania - shops closed; Zanesville, Ohio - hotel construction halted, factories and foundries shut down; Toledo, Ohio - general strike, calling for a minimum wage of \$1.50 per day; Texas and Pacific Railroad workers in Marshall, Texas, strike against the ten per cent cut. African-American workers in the South struck for equal pay to white workers in Galveston, Texas; black sewer workers in Louisville, Kentucky, initiated a strike that within three days involved coopers, textile workers, brick makers, cabinet workers and factory workers. Within a week after it began in Martinsburg, the railroad strike reached East St. Louis, where 500 members of the St. Louis Workingmen's Party joined 1,000 railroad workers and residents. Strikers in St. Louis continued operation of non-freight trains themselves, collecting fares; rail officials would have preferred to have all service extinguished, so that passengers would discredit the strikers and side with the companies.

For all of its fervor and support, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 ended by August 1, unsuccessful, its workers no better off at the end than when it began. Workers did not receive pay raises; legislation strengthened anti-union attitudes, and state militias were increased. What went wrong? In many ways, the very spontaneity of the strike was its own undoing; the workers were, after all, unorganized. The strike evolved, or erupted, because of a collective dissatisfaction with workers' loss of control to company bosses, and an almost subliminal idea that their power lie in mutual support. The workers overthrew established authority and control, but were unable to sustain the momentum or unity as the strike grew. After initially being ousted, forces of law and order regrouped in short order and were able to marshal their forces swiftly and confidently. In cities such as Chicago, Civil War veterans were organized ward by ward; civilians were sworn in as special police, freeing regular police for strike-related duty. The general public feared the violence of the workers; many editorials and pundits aligned their actions with those of the 1871 Paris Commune uprising. Whispers and headlines included the words "socialists," "anarchists," and "communists." Behind all local and state efforts to break the strike was the federal government, with its military and legislative muscle.

Ultimately the strike involved more than 100,000 railroad workers in fourteen states; they walked off their jobs, smashed cars and pulled up tracks in Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Toledo, Louisville, Buffalo, and San Francisco. Before service was restored, more than 100 were dead, hundreds injured, thousands jailed, \$5 million of property destroyed.

The Great Strike of 1877 is memorable for being the first of many to follow. Its dramatic display of cooperative power virtually ceased the movements of society and commerce. This lesson was not lost

on business owners, many of whom thought twice about cutting wages in the near future. Some companies in the 1880s initiated labor reforms, providing death benefits, limited medical services, and pension plans for their workers. The Workingmen's Party gained a national presence. And, in 1878, the opponents of workers' revolts began constructing the protective armories.

**Sources:**

- *The Albany Argus*. July 16 - August 2, 1877.
- Brecher, Jeremy. *Strike!* Revised and updated edition. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1997.
- *Creating America: a History of the United States*. Evanston, Illinois: McDougall-Littell, 2001.
- Josephson, Matthew. *The Robber Barons*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1934, 1962 (renewed).
- Lesh, Bruce. "Using Primary Sources to Teach the Rail Strike of 1877." *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History: The Gilded Age*. Vol. 13 No. 4, Summer 1999.
- Mofford, Juliet Haines (editor). *Talkin' Union: The American Labor Movement*. Carlisle, MA: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1997.

# Resources for Teachers and Students of Labor History

Brecher, Jeremy. *Strike!* Revised and updated edition. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1997.  
An American labor history from the Great Upheaval (chapter 1) to the Teamsters' UPS strike of 1997, told from the perspective of the rank-and-file workers.  
Order information: South End Press, 7 Brookline Street, #1, Cambridge, MA 02139-4146;  
ISBN 0-89608-570-8 (cloth); ISBN 0-89608-569-4 (paper)

*Cobblestone*. The History Magazine for Young People. "The History of Labor." Vol. 13, #8,  
Peterborough, New Hampshire, October, 1992.

Freedman, Russell. *Kids At Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor*.  
New York, New York: Scholastic Inc., 1995.  
Easy to read, with photographs by Lewis Hine, possibly the finest chronicler of the conditions of children working in industrial jobs at the turn of the nineteenth century.  
Order information: Published by Scholastic Inc., by arrangement with Clarion Books, a Houghton-Mifflin Company imprint; ISBN 0-590-54334-2.

Josephson, Matthew. *The Robber Barons*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1934, 1962 (renewed).  
Order information: ISBN 0-15-676790-2.

Lesh, Bruce. "Using Primary Sources to Teach the Rail Strike of 1877." *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History: The Gilded Age*. Vol. 13 No. 4, Summer 1999.  
Order information: Organization of American Historians, 112 North Bryan Avenue,  
Bloomington, Indiana 47408-4199; telephone (812) 855-7311; e-mail magazine@oah.org;  
online: <http://www.oah.org>.

Mofford, Juliet Haines (editor). *Talkin' Union: The American Labor Movement*.  
Carlisle, MA: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1997.  
A collection of primary sources, including speeches, song lyrics, illustrations, political cartoons and eyewitness accounts of the American labor movement in the nineteenth and twentieth century.  
Order information: Discovery Enterprises (1-800-729-1720); ISBN 1-878668-79-X.

*Songs for Labor: AFL-CIO Publication #56*. AFL-CIO Department of Education, Washington, D.C., December, 1983.

Stowell, David O. "Albany's Great Strike of 1877." *New York History*, January 1995. New York State Historical Association, 1995.

Stowell, David O. "Small Property Holders and the Great Strike of 1877." *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 21 No. 6, September 1995, pp. 741-763. Sage Publications, 1995.

## Getting Started: Vocabulary for the study of labor history

The following words are some basic terms, people and events related to the rise of Big Business and organized labor in the United States. Use your texts, dictionaries and any other resources to determine their meanings. Write the information in your own words, so that you can understand how they are related to the labor movement. Put the information in your notebooks, as instructed by your teacher. As you complete your research, add to the list any other related terms or events unfamiliar to you.

Anarchy	Homestead Strike	negotiations
assembly lines	horizontal integration	organized labor
big business	incendiary	Panic of 1873
blacklist	labor union	rank and file
boycott	laborers	ringleader
business trusts	laissez-faire	scab
capital	lock out	sit-down strike
capitalism	management	standardized parts
closed shop	mass production	strike
collective bargaining	minimum wage	technological advancements
company town	Molly Maguires	vertical integration
competition	Monopolies	walk out
division of labor	natural resources	working condition

# Student Activity One: Comparing Primary & Secondary Sources

## Materials:

- Classroom United States history texts
- Student Notebooks
- Transcriptions from ***The Albany Argus***:
  - Document # 1 - July 17, 1877 front page report: *Serious Strike*
  - Document # 2A - July 20, 1877 editorial: *The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Strike*
  - Document # 3 - July 21, 1877 editorial: *The Strike and The Troops*

## Introduction:

Classroom textbooks may be the first place you look for information about historical events, but they may not contain enough information or present historical events in an unbiased way. That is because they are **secondary sources**; in other words, the authors themselves were not witnesses to all the events included in the books. In addition, they or their editors have made certain choices regarding what to include or leave out of the texts. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, Internet Web sites, biographies, historical non-fiction books are other examples of secondary sources.

Because textbooks must contain a great deal of historical information, events that were important when they occurred may be described in a paragraph or two in the texts, due to space considerations. The choices made by editors or authors affect our understanding or opinions regarding history, sometimes causing us to favor one side in a conflict over another. Regardless of the length, textbook accounts of historical events should answer basic questions about topics and events. These questions are known in newspaper writing as the "5 Ws" - who, what, when, where, why - and then, what was the result.

To truly research a topic or event in history, you may begin with secondary sources to get some information, but you will need to also use **primary sources**, information about the topic or event from the actual time period in which the event occurred. Primary sources fall into three categories: (1) official documents, like a birth certificate, law, marriage license; (2) eye or ear witness accounts, such as an oral history or interview with someone who was actually present at the time of the event, or someone's diary; and (3) physical remains, such as photographs, newspaper articles from the period, buildings, clothing, etc.

In this activity, you will compare how the Railroad Strike of 1877 (sometimes called "The Great Strike of 1877") is reported in the textbooks available in your classroom with several actual reports of the strike printed in an important newspaper from that time period, ***The Albany Argus***.

\*\*\*\*\*

### \*\*\*\* ***After Doing This Activity: Correlating Activities*** \*\*\*\*

Become a textbook writer of the future... Select a current, significant news story widely reported in the newspaper over a period of several days or weeks. (An example from recent years might be the results of the 2000 presidential election.) How would this event be reported in a textbook your children might use when they are in middle or high school? Write the textbook entry for this event, remembering to keep it brief, unbiased, and complete (able to answer the journalist's "5 Ws").

**Activity Directions** (you may work individually or in pairs, as directed by your teacher):

1. Create a chart in your notebook that lists the "5 Ws" of journalism, and the categories SECONDARY SOURCE and PRIMARY SOURCE. Leave plenty of room (more than the sample) to write your answers in the spaces. Your chart may look something like this:

QUESTIONS	SECONDARY SOURCE	PRIMARY SOURCE
Who went on strike?		
Why did it occur?		
When did it begin?		
Where did it take place?		
What happened?		
What was the result?		

2. Using the INDEX in any available U.S history textbook, look up the Railroad Strike of 1877 (sometimes called "The Great Strike of 1877"). If it is not listed in the text, refer to another text. (Use ONLY a textbook; do NOT use a search engine on the Internet to do this part of the activity.)

3. Read the section(s) concerning the Strike of 1877. Then, fill in the chart under SECONDARY SOURCE, answering the questions using the text as your only resource. Don't worry if you have some empty spaces.

4. Next, carefully read Documents #1, 2A, and 3, originally published in *The Albany Argus* in July, 1877. Determine the meaning of any unfamiliar terms by using the dictionary, context clues from the article, or asking an adult.

5. Using information from the documents, fill in the chart under PRIMARY SOURCE, answering the questions using the newspaper articles as your only resource.

6. Look at your results (compare both sides of the chart). Discuss the answers to these questions:

- Why was this strike important? Support your opinion with evidence from the sources.
- Which column, SECONDARY or PRIMARY, contains more information?
- Which source provided a clearer picture of the event? Why?
- Which source was easier to read? Why? Support your opinion with evidence from the sources.
- Which source helped you better understand why the workers went on strike?
- Did any source seem to support or favor one side over another in the strike? Support your opinion with evidence from the sources.
- Why might it be better to use secondary *and* primary sources to learn the complete story of an event? Why might historians use *several* secondary sources as well as *several* primary sources to research a topic or event?

## Student Activity Two: Guided Reading #1

### Materials:

- Classroom United States history text
- Dictionary
- Transcriptions from ***The Albany Argus***:
  - Document # 3 - July 21, 1877 editorial: *The Strike and The Troops*

### Activity Directions:

Carefully read Document #3, *The Strike and The Troops*. Then, use Document #3, other resources (text, dictionary, etc.) and your knowledge of social studies to answer the following questions based on the document. Put your answers in your own words; supply examples from the document when asked to "support your answer with evidence."

#### *Paragraph 1:*

1. Why were Federal troops needed in West Virginia?

2. Why does the author consider sending Federal troops into West Virginia legal?

#### *Paragraph 2:*

3. The New York Evening Post, another newspaper, considers the use of Federal troops a "violation of Democratic doctrine." What right(s) of citizens in a democracy are being violated? Refer to the specific Constitutional amendment protecting this right in your answer.

4. The author calls The Evening Post's position "puerile." Write two synonyms (words that have the same meaning) for "puerile."

*Paragraph 4:*

5. According to the author, who is usually responsible for creating riots and disturbances?

*Paragraph 5:*

6. Why did the men riot?

7. Does the author think they were justified to riot? Support your answer with evidence from the document.

*Paragraph 6:*

8. According to the author, why are businessmen reluctant (not eager) to reduce the wages of their workers?

*Thought Question:*

9. Who does the author feel is responsible for creating the conflict and the resulting problems? Support your answer with evidence from the document.

## Student Activity Three: Constructed Response Question #1

### Materials:

Transcriptions from *The Albany Argus*:

- Document #5A - July 24, 1877: A PROCLAMATION By the Governor.

### Activity Directions:

Carefully read Document #5A, A PROCLAMATION By the Governor. Then, use Document #5A and your knowledge of social studies to answer the following questions. Put your answers in your own words; supply examples from the document when asked to "support your answer with evidence."

1. What is the name of the governor of New York State in 1877?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The Railroad Strike of 1877 began in Martinsburg, West Virginia, on July 16. When and where did the governor write this statement, and when was it issued (presented to the public)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What circumstances caused the governor to issue this statement?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What specifically does the governor want the strikers to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What specifically does the governor expect "all good citizens" to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What does the governor believe he, as leader of NYS, must do when such disturbances occur?

## Student Activity Four: Constructed Response Question #2

### Materials:

Transcriptions from *The Albany Argus*:

- Document #5B - July 27, 1877: A PROCLAMATION By the Mayor.

### Activity Directions:

Carefully read Document #5B, A PROCLAMATION By the Mayor. Then, use Document #5B and your knowledge of social studies to answer the following questions. Put your answers in your own words; supply examples from the document when asked to "support your answer with evidence."

1. What circumstances caused Albany's Mayor A. Bleecker Banks to issue this statement?
2. List three reasons why Mayor Banks doesn't believe workingmen of Albany want to riot:
  - (a)
  - (b)
  - (c)
3. Why does the mayor want to stop people from meeting in large groups?
4. According to the mayor, why shouldn't workingmen drink liquor?
5. What does the mayor believe he, as leader of the city, must do when such disturbances occur?
6. What does the mayor request of all men in Albany?

## Student Activity Five: Whose Rights? Who's Right? Determining points of view (POV)

### Materials:

- U.S. history texts, containing a copy of United States Constitution
- Student Notebook
- Transcriptions from ***The Albany Argus***:
  - Document # 3 - July 21, 1877 editorial: *The Strike and the Troops*
  - Document #5A – July 24, 1877: A PROCLAMATION By the Governor
  - Document #5B – July 27, 1877: A PROCLAMATION By the Mayor
  - Document #6C – July 25, 1877 editorial: THE DUTY OF CITIZENS

### Introduction:

There are at least two sides to any story, even those in history. Railroad workers, large and small business owners, ordinary citizens, newspaper writers, and public officials acted and reacted differently to the circumstances and events surrounding the Great Strike of 1877, based on their respective points of view (POV). Each side believed it behaved reasonably, justifiably, even legally, and cited state and federal laws in their defense.

As you learn more about a conflict, you may also begin to see that, while an action may be “legal,” it’s not always “right” or fair, or just. Behavior can be legally correct but morally wrong. And, since the strike created an emergency situation, the rights of individuals may have been Constitutionally compromised for the good of society.

In this activity, you will determine which behaviors of workers, owners, managers, and public officials were legally protected by the Constitution during the Great Strike.

### Activity Directions (You may work individually or in pairs, as directed by your teacher):

1. Carefully read Documents #3, 5A, 5B, and 6C, originally published in ***The Albany Argus*** in July, 1877. Determine the meaning of any unfamiliar terms by using the dictionary, context clues from the article, or asking an adult.
2. In your notebook, divide a sheet of paper into two columns. Label the left side RR WORKERS. Make a list of the specific requests made and actions taken by the workers during the labor dispute (such as: stopped working; held meetings; listened to speakers; demanded \$2 per day; etc.) If you completed Student Activities Two, Three and Four, use the information on your worksheets to help you.
3. Skip two lines, then label the left column RR MANAGERS & OWNERS. Make a list of the specific requests made and actions taken by the managers and/or owners during the labor dispute (such as; reduced wages ten per cent; asked for Federal troops; etc). If you completed Student Activities Two, Three and Four, use the information on your worksheets to help you.
4. Do the same for PUBLIC OFFICIALS. This refers to government leaders at the federal, state and local levels.

5. When you have all three lists, put an asterisk (\*) next to those actions that are "rights" protected by the Constitution and other laws in 1877. Using your textbook and a copy of the Constitution, find evidence of this protection; on the right hand side, cite specific portions of the Constitution or the names of particular laws mentioned in your textbook to support your answers. Remember to only use those portions of the Constitution in affect in 1877.
6. Review your answers with 2-3 other students, or the class (as directed by your teacher). Discuss the following questions:
  - Were all groups justified in acting they way they did?
  - Which actions were protected legally during the Great Strike?
  - Were any "rights" denied?
  - Was one group more legally protected than another? If so, why?
  - Whose "rights" do the writers and/or the editors of ***The Albany Argus*** support or favor? Support your answer with evidence from the documents.
7. News articles are supposed to be unbiased, objectively written. Opinions are supposed to be expressed on the editorial page, which are more subjective. In what ways might a newspaper support one side in a conflict over another? In the 19th century, which groups or people in a community might a large newspaper support? Why? What types of readers would they hope to attract with their publication? Support your answer with evidence from your knowledge of social studies.

**\*\*\*\* After Doing This Activity: Correlating Activities \*\*\*\***

**Develop a Point of View:**

Write an editorial for ***The Albany Argus***, supporting the workers in the Great Strike. Make certain to use persuasive techniques that would convince business owners and public officials that the workers' actions are justified and morally correct. Refer to the editorials and articles in this activity for style and format typical of 19th century journalism.

**Determining Points of View (POV):**

Refer to the editorial pages of your local newspaper over a period of time, perhaps for two or three weeks. Editorials written by the publishers of the newspaper usually are found on the left hand page; those written by guest writers or syndicated columnists are on the right. Use the editorials written by the newspaper to determine the answers to the following questions:

- What issues do the editorials written by the newspaper seem to support?
- Which issues does it not?
- What, if anything, do they appear to have in common?
- Does the newspaper have a point of view?
- What types of readers are they hoping to attract and/or influence?
- Compare the opinions expressed in these editorials with related news articles. How are they affected by the newspaper's POV? Support your answer with evidence from the articles.

## Student Activity Six:

# DBQ: The Effects of Labor Conflict on Everyday Life

### Materials:

- Classroom United States history text and notes
- Transcriptions from ***The Albany Argus***:
  - DOCUMENT #2B - July 21, 1877, excerpts from Page One: *THE FIREMEN'S STRIKES*
  - DOCUMENT #2C - July 21, 1877, excerpts from Page One: *The Pennsylvania and Other Roads*
  - DOCUMENT #4B - July 23, 1877, Editorial Page: *Matters at Albany Quiet*
  - DOCUMENT #5A - July 24, 1877, *A PROCLAMATION By the Governor (of New York State)*
  - DOCUMENT #5C - July 24, 1877, editorial: *THE STRIKE OF THE TRAINMEN*
  - DOCUMENT #6C - July 25, 1877, editorial: *THE DUTY OF CITIZENS*
  - DOCUMENT #7 - Excerpts from VICINITY AND STATE: July 27, 1877 and July 28, 1877

This assignment is based on the accompanying documents (listed above). Some of these documents have been edited for the purposes of this assignment. Read all directions before you begin.

### Directions:

There are two parts to this assignment, Part A (Short Answer Questions) and part B (Essay).

### Historical Context:

In the second half of the nineteenth century, industrialization changed the way in which Americans lived. People in different regions of the nation now had their lives connected economically, and no other business represented this connection better than the railroad industry. The Great Strike of 1877 began as a simple reaction of railroad workers in West Virginia to unfair practices by company owners. Within a short period of time, it became an emergency situation affecting many people's lives throughout the nation.

### Task:

Using information from the documents and your knowledge of social studies, answer the questions that accompany each document in Part A - Short Answer Questions. The Short Answer Questions are designed to help you understand the documents and collect information to use in your essay. Write your answers on the worksheet.

Then, complete the Part B Essay based on the documents. The Essay is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. You are to use the documents and your knowledge of social studies in the Part B Essay to:

- Describe why the Great Strike of 1877 was an emergency;
- Identify three different groups of Americans experiencing changes in their lives as a result of the Great Strike; and
- For each group, explain one way in which the people in that group had their lives changed by the strike.

Use other paper for your answer.

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Document-Based Question: Part A - Short Answer Questions Worksheet

The questions in Part A are based on the following documents:

- Document #2B - July 21, 1877, excerpts from Page One: THE FIREMEN'S STRIKES
- Document #2C - July 21, 1877, excerpts from Page One: The Pennsylvania and Other Roads
- Document #4B - July 23, 1877, Editorial Page: Matters at Albany Quiet
- Document #5A - July 24, 1877, A PROCLAMATION By the Governor (of New York State)
- Document #5C - July 24, 1877, editorial: THE STRIKE OF THE TRAINMEN
- Document #6C - July 25, 1877, editorial: THE DUTY OF CITIZENS
- Document #7 - Excerpts from VICINITY AND STATE: July 27, 1877 and July 28, 1877

Read each document; answer all parts of the questions for each document to receive full credit on this sheet. Do not quote the document directly; put your responses in your own words. Then, use the answers on this worksheet (Part A) to help you develop your Part B Essay.

-----  
Document 2B: *The Firemen's Strike*

Group(s) affected:

1. What evidence from this document supports the subtitle, "They Are Spreading in All Directions"?
  
2. What business is beginning to feel the effects of the strike?
  
3. What actions are the strikers taking to achieve their goals?

-----  
Document #2C: *The Pennsylvania and Other Roads*

Group affected:

4. What information from this document indicates the strike is becoming serious?
  
5. What actions did Pennsylvania Governor Hartcranft take to stop the strike?

-----  
Document #4B: *Matters at Albany Quiet*

Group affected:

6. What rumor indicates the strike is affecting the meat packing industry?
  
  7. Why might the workers in West Albany want to strike?
  
  8. What would the owner of the New York Central RR do to prevent his workers from striking?
-

Document #5A: *A Proclamation By the Governor (of New York State)*

Group affected:

9. What does Governor Robinson want local government leaders throughout New York State to do during the strike?

10. According to Governor Robinson, what are the most important things to protect during the strike?

-----  
Document #5C: *The Strike of the Trainmen*

Group affected:

11. Why did the government of West Virginia have difficulty stopping the strike?

12. Why did the workers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, join the strike?

-----  
Document #6C: *The Duty of Citizens*

Group affected:

13. What behavior should the citizens of Albany, New York, avoid during the railroad strike?

-----  
Document #7: *Vicinity and State*

Group(s) affected:

14. In what ways have the residents of New York been affected by the strike?

15. When will the knit goods manufacturers of Cohoes expect to get paid for their products?

## **Part B: Essay**

### **DBQ: The Effects of Labor Conflict on Everyday Life**

#### **Directions:**

- Write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs containing supporting evidence, and a conclusion.
- Use evidence from the documents to support your response.
- Include specific related outside information.
- Use black or dark ink to write your essay on other paper.

#### **Historical Context:**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, industrialization changed the way in which Americans lived. People in different regions of the nation now had their lives connected economically, and no other business represented this connection better than the railroad industry. The Great Strike of 1877 began as a simple reaction of railroad workers in West Virginia to unfair practices by company owners. Within a short period of time, it became an emergency situation affecting many people's lives throughout the nation.

**Task:**

Using information from the documents and your knowledge of social studies, answer the questions that accompany each document in Part A. Then, complete the Part B Essay based on the documents. The Essay is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. You are to use the documents and your knowledge of social studies in the Part B Essay to:

- Describe why the Great Strike of 1877 was an emergency;
- Identify three different groups of Americans experiencing changes in their lives as a result of the Great Strike; and
- For each group, explain one way in which the people in that group had their lives changed by the strike.

Use other paper for your answer.

Remember, you must use information from *one more than half the documents provided* in your essay.

To receive full credit, your essay must include:

- an introduction;
- why the Great Strike of 1877 was an emergency;
- three different groups of Americans whose lives were affected by the strike;
- one specific example of how people's lives *in each group* were changed by the strike;
- evidence from the documents provided;
- related information from your knowledge of social studies (outside sources);
- no repetition (direct quotes) of the contents of the documents;
- relationship of the documents to the historical context;
- conclusion paragraph;
- appropriate use of grammar, spelling, sentence structure, punctuation.

(This list is also the scoring guide that will be used to evaluate your work.)

Documents for Part A - Document Based Question (DBQ):

## ***The Effects of Labor Conflict on Everyday Life***

### **Selected Documents**

Transcriptions from ***The Albany Argus***:

- DOCUMENT #2B - July 21, 1877, excerpts from Page One: *THE FIREMEN'S STRIKES*
- DOCUMENT #2C - July 21, 1877, excerpts from Page One: *The Pennsylvania and Other Roads*
- DOCUMENT #4B - July 23, 1877, Editorial Page: *Matters at Albany Quiet*
- DOCUMENT #5A - July 24, 1877, *A PROCLAMATION By the Governor (of New York State)*
- DOCUMENT #5C - July 24, 1877, editorial: *THE STRIKE OF THE TRAINMEN*
- DOCUMENT #6C - July 25, 1877, editorial: *THE DUTY OF CITIZENS*
- DOCUMENT #7 - Excerpts from VICINITY AND STATE: July 27, 1877 and July 28, 1877

# Student Activity Seven: Guided Reading #2: Comparing the Homestead Strike of 1892 with the Great Strike of 1877

## Materials:

- Classroom United States history text
- Dictionary
- Transcription from **Buffalo Morning Express**:
  - Document # 8 - July 16, 1892: *Leader of '77*

## Activity Directions:

Carefully read Document #8, *Leader of '77*. Then, use Document #8, other resources (text, dictionary, etc.) and your knowledge of social studies to answer the following questions based on the document. Put your answers in your own words; supply examples from the document when asked to "support your answer with evidence."

1. A subtitle of this article is "Some Reminiscences." What does it mean to reminisce?
2. Who was Robert A. Ammon in 1877?
3. Describe Robert A. Ammon in 1892. Include his occupation.
4. **Definition - Primary Source:** (1) *an official document (e.g. license; legislation; report card); (2) eye or ear witness account (e.g. letters; journal entries; interviews; oral histories), or (3) physical remains (e.g. photographs; clothing; furniture) that provides information about an event or time period and is from the period.*  
Using this definition, why is this document considered a "primary source"? Under what category or categories might it be classified?
5. What action(s) taken by the railroads in 1877 resulted in the workers going on strike?

6. What did the railroads believe would prevent a general strike of the railroad workers?
  
7. List three reasons the strike was initially (at first) successful in Pennsylvania.
  
8. Why did the Philadelphia troops use force against the strikers?
  
9. How did the strikers force the Philadelphia troops out of their attack post?
  
10. "...the road had to *capitulate* and to give us the extra 10 per cent..." What does the word *capitulate* mean?
  
11. A Mr. Frick is mentioned in the interview. Who is he, and what is his role in the Homestead Steel Company or the strike? Who is his boss (the owner of the company)?
  
12. According to Mr. Ammon, what is Mr. Frick's goal? What will happen to labor unions if he succeeds?
  
13. What actions does Mr. Ammon feel the workers in the Homestead Strike should take?
  
14. According to Mr. Ammon, what would improve conditions between labor (workers) and management or business owners? Put your answer in your own words.

15. The Great Strike of 1877 involved railroads; the Homestead Strike of 1892 involved steel production. How are these two industries important to the industrial growth of the United States?

16. In this interview, Mr. Ammon compares the Railroad Strike of 1877 with the Homestead Strike of 1892. Make a chart in your notebook or on another piece of paper; create two columns, one for each strike. Then, compare the two strikes in the following categories:

- industry involved;
- specific companies involved;
- company owners;
- type of workers involved;
- company actions resulting in work stoppage;
- actions taken by workers;
- actions taken by business owners;
- identification of important individuals involved in the event;
- results of the strike.

Use information from this document (interview) first to fill in your chart. Next, use any other sources to complete your comparison.

17. In a well written essay, explain why the Great Strike of 1877 and the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892 are considered important in labor history. How did each strike positively or negatively affect the labor movement in the United States?

Use other paper for your answer. Support your position with specific evidence.

# About the New York State Newspaper Project and the Friends of the New York State Newspaper Project

The **New York State Newspaper Project** located, cataloged and preserved on microfilm the significant newspapers published in New York State since 1725, the year New York's first newspaper, *The New-York Gazette*, was published.

The Project began its work in March 1987 and ceased operation on January 31, 2007. It was part of a national newspaper preservation effort, the United States Newspaper Program, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The **Friends of the New York State Newspaper Project** was formed on May 14, 1991 to carry out activities that increase public awareness of the project, the many uses of the content of newspapers, and the need for their preservation and for easy access to them.

## About the Author

Maryanne Malecki is an educator with extensive experience helping teachers and students enjoy research, writing, and New York State and American history. She has worked as a teacher and/or administrator in residential treatment centers, public and private education (K-12), arts-in-education programs, migrant education, and teacher preparatory courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

The University at Albany honored Maryanne for her work with pre-service teachers, and the Daughters of the American Revolution named her New York State American History Teacher of the Year in 1995. The American School Boards Association recognized her program, Critical Choices: Town Meetings, Elementary Style, as one of its One Hundred Outstanding Curriculum Ideas for 1990.

She has written and developed instructional materials based on documents, objects, artifacts and primary sources for the New York Times, the New York Newspaper Project, the Albany County Hall of Records, McDougal Littell, the New-York Historical Society, the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, and the New York Lottery's mobile exhibits.

Currently, Maryanne is the education director for WAMC Northeast Public Radio, and is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Developmental Studies, Continuing Education Division, Schenectady County Community College.