Guarding the Switch: Cultivating Nationalism during the Pullman Strike

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The Pullman Strike of 1894 was a cataclysmic event for the nation. During its violent course, the print media provided an interpretive frame that portrayed the strike in large measure as an immigrant-inspired attack on American laws and democratic customs. Often characterizing the strikers as "foreigners" in the thrall of anarchist ideologies and a tyrannous labor chieftain, journalists painted a stark picture indeed. Employing framing theory, Gramsci's notion of hegemony, and recent insights on the ethnic quality of nationalism, this essay argues that newspapers and other major print periodicals significantly contributed to the formation of nationalist attitudes at a time when many Americans were deeply worried over the direction in which the country was headed.

In the summer of 1894, *Harper's Weekly* dispatched the renowned Western artist Frederic Remington to Chicago to report on the ongoing Pullman Strike. A self-made adventurer pleased with the opportunity to witness an episode of industrial warfare, Remington arrived to find a city confronted by "the mob." In a trilogy of articles with accompanying illustrations, Remington covered the movement of federal troops sent to the area. The story he told was one of struggle and triumph, of the manly imposition of law and order over the chaos of immigrant-inspired anarchy. Included in Remington's cast of characters was the stolid Captain Capron, "standing in front of his battery park, as natural as when I had last seen him at Pine Ridge, just after Wounded Knee." Also among these "tall, bronzed young athletes" was one Lieutenant Sherer.[1]

In a vivid illustration in the July 28, 1894, edition of *Harper's*, Remington portrayed Sherer facing off against a mob intent on sabotaging a rail switch. The image, titled "Lieutenant Sherer, Seventh Cavalry, Standing off a Mob at the Stock Yards," depicts the young officer standing firm, one hand holding the switch, the other with pistol drawn at his side, ready to be used if necessary. With this image, in no uncertain terms, Remington captured the media's nationalist interpretation of the Pullman Strike. Here a living symbol of the armed American state single-handedly prevented a mob from carrying out an act of sabotage against the national transportation system.[2]

[1]Frederic Remington, "Chicago under the Mob," "Chicago under the Law," and "The Withdrawal of U.S. Troops," in *Harper's Weekly,* July 21, 28, Aug. 11, 1894. The author thanks Joyce Appleby, Graham Cassano, Allesandro Duranti, Naomi Lamoreaux, and John Laslett for their help and support.

[2]Remington, "Chicago under the Law." On Remington's views of immigrants and minori-

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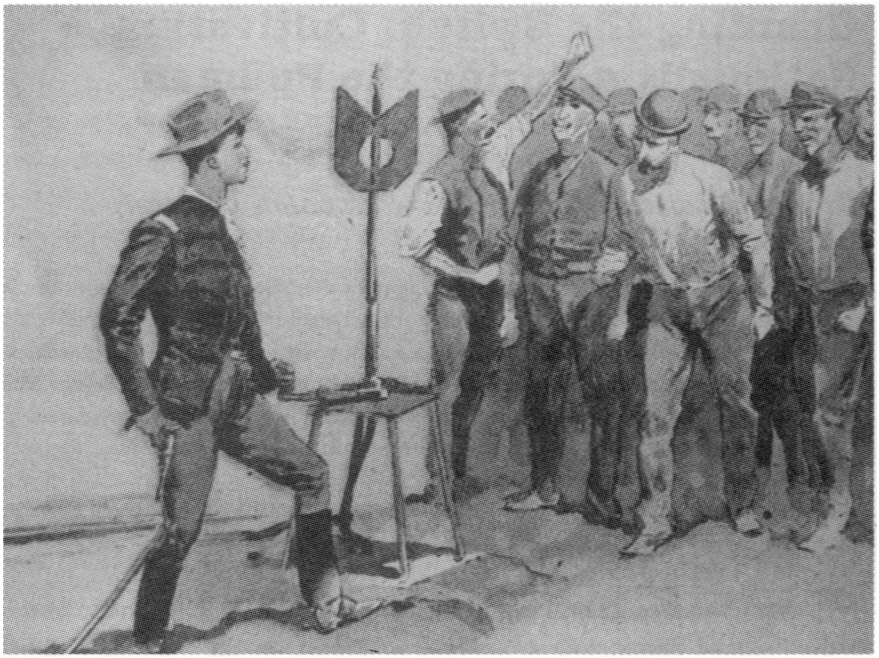


Figure 1: "Lieutenant Sherer, Seventh Cavalry, Standing Off a Mob at the Stock-Yards, 1894," from *Harper's Weekly*, July 28, 1894.

This depiction of the defense of order by a representative of the state (an image that certainly echoed Remington's oeuvre of illustrations showing the epic struggle between white civilization and native savagery) reveals the underlying crisis of identity that shaped media accounts of the Pullman Strike. Begun as a relatively contained walkout of railroad shop workers in George Mortimer Pullman's eponymous city, the strike had become much more than the sum of its parts once the massive American Railway Union (ARU) became involved. According to much of the mainstream media, the ARU's national boycott of Pullman cars represented an assault on the republic itself. As Remington's articles and images suggested, the Pullman Strike was nothing less than an incipient "civil war" waged between the forces of order and anarchy. It would be up to the citizens and the state to hold the line.[3]

ties, see David McCullough, "Remington—The Man" in Michael Edward Shapiro and Peter H. Hassrick's *Frederic Remington: The Masterworks* (New York, 1991), 28–29. Remington's literary techniques in regard to the Pullman Strike are explored in Roscoe L. Buckland, *Frederic Remington: The Writer* (New York, 2000), 74–75; and Ben Merchant Vorpahl, *Frederic Remington and the West: With the Eye of the Mind* (Austin, 1978), 171. See also Alexander Nemerov, *Frederic Remington and Turn-of-the-Century America* (New Haven, 1995), 112–13.

[3]A number of histories deal with the Pullman Strike: Almont Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval*, (1942; repr. Chicago, 1971); David Ray Papke, *The Pullman Case: The Clash of Labor and Capital in Industrial America* (Lawrence, KS, 1999); Thomas Manning, *The Chicago Strike of 1894: Industrial Labor in the Late*

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A key episode in American history, the Pullman Strike has received much attention from scholars. Some writers have viewed it as a watershed moment in which protocapitalist, "producerist" ideology finally went silent, heralding the ascent of the conservative and accomodationist American Federation of Labor. Historians have also interpreted Pullman for what it reveals about working-class cooperation and about the gendered meanings of class. Scholars have portrayed it as a laboratory for new media technologies and legal discourses, as well as a signal moment of hegemonic contestation.[4] In the following essay, I will focus on the media's treatment of the strike in terms of a different aspect of the event: the cultivation of intense nationalistic fervor.

Nationalism, which Benedict Anderson describes as a process of social invention, offers a fruitful means of understanding American perception of class conflict in the late nineteenth century. Following Anderson's "imagined community" thesis, especially regarding the significance of print media in facilitating nationalist identity, and combining this with insights from theorists such as Peter Sahlins and others who develop the notion that constructions of nationalism involve acts of purposeful exclusion (often linking the state with a particular, exclusive, racial and religious identity), I aim to show how the mainstream media's coverage of the Pullman Strike illustrates a liminal moment of nationalist formation.[5]

The Pullman Strike offers a compelling example of nationalist cultivation for several reasons. First, it helps shed light on America's unique experiment with identity formation, calling to mind analyses of democratic "civic" nationalism versus undemocratic "racial" nationalism. American efforts to link the nation with a particular racial group makes the country an especially interesting example of a phenomenon mostly applied to Europe.[6] During

Nineteenth Century (New York, 1960); Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago, 1995).

[4]See especially the essays in Richard Schneirov, Shelton Stromquist, and Nick Salvatore, eds., *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890's: Essays on Labor and Politics*, (Urbana, 1999); Kevin Ayotte, "Constructions of Violence: Labor, Capital, and Hegemonic Struggle in the Pullman Strike of 1894" in *Turning the Century: Essays in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Carol A. Stabile (Boulder, CO, 2000); Papke, *The Pullman Case.*

[5]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 1991), 6–7; Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, 1989). There is a growing body of literature on nationalism, within which one finds numerous definitions of the term. For a good overview of the theoretical issues involved in defining nationalism, see Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge, 2001). My view of nationalism combines Benedict Anderson's notion of popular imagined construction with elements of Peter Sahlin's concept of exclusivity and Anthony Marx's and Anthony Smith's arguments about the ethnic, restrictive roots of national identity in the West. See Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (New York, 2003); and Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York, 1986).

[6]See Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton,

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the strike, the media appealed to a white middle-class audience in its presentation of a horror story of revolution, anarchism, and alien invasion. The condemnation of striking foreigners—a stereotype employed freely even though huge numbers of the strike's leaders and participants were native-born Americans—would be successfully coupled with a celebration of stalwart Anglo resistance to supposedly alien agitators and their un-American ideas. Civic and racial nationalism would blur together.

Second, the nationalistic coverage of the Pullman Strike reveals Americans' difficult late nineteenth-century relationship with organized labor and immigration generally. While unions might theoretically be accommodated, the press alternately informed the American public that it was dangerous to think in class terms (i.e., proletariat versus capitalists)—and yet the strike could still be understood as a flawed *working-class* uprising. Because many people, even among the middle class, sympathized with workers' complaints against George Pullman and his company, the press struggled to combine flat condemnation of the strikers with recognition of the merits of resistance to power-hungry industrialists. This event, therefore, inspired no mere hurrah for God and country. Newspapers and magazines had to contend with an unpopular capitalist in an age of antimonopolist populism.[7] Given these realities, analyzing the media's cultivation of nationalism is all the more interesting and informative.

My analysis is based on a close reading of major periodicals from May through September 1894, including widely read newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *New York World*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. In addition to these and other newspapers, I have examined major magazines and journals such as *Harper's Weekly*, the *Arena*, and the *Nation*. Finally, I looked at a representative set of popular labor periodicals, such as the *American Federationist* (AFL) and Eugene Debs's *Railway Times* (ARU).[8] Evaluating the language and content of these media organs, focusing on commonly used keywords and themes relating to national identity and the state, I have found that nationalism played a key part in the popular construction of the meaning of the Pullman Strike. By and large, the press evoked nationalism in ways that delegitimized the strikers and their cause. However, the media was not mono-

2001). Wilbur Zelinsky argues that America provides an especially good case study because it is "the purest instance of state and nation formation uncorrupted by older mentors or irrelevant complexities." See Zelinsky, *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 18.

[7]On popular antimonopolist sentiment at the time, see James L. Huston, *Securing the Fruits of Labor: The American Concept of Wealth Distribution, 1765–1900* (Baton Rouge, 1998).

[8]Sources include the *New York Times*, *New York World*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New Orleans Picayune*, *The Railway Times*, *The Arena*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, *American Federationist*, *Nation*, and *Boston Labor Leader*.

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lithic. As will be discussed, prolabor publications could use patriotic sentiment to champion the strikers' cause and even challenge the supremacy of industrial capitalism, thus demonstrating the contested nature of national identity in the late nineteenth century.

In terms of the theoretical underpinnings of this analysis, it is necessary to say something about the authority that I grant to the news media in 1894. The popular press, I contend, played an active rather than a passive role in shaping popular opinion on the strike. Employing the insights of news-framing theory, I argue that the news media presented a specific narrative slant to this event in order to channel public opinion in specific ways. Framing theory, which posits that the news media "frames" events along particular narrative lines (rather than presenting an opaque window on "the facts"), offers a valuable set of tools with which to analyze the role of the media in public life.[9] By highlighting certain aspects of a "story"—indeed, the act of telling a story requires that one be selective—the press shapes a sequence of events that by definition excludes certain counter-narratives. Most press accounts of the Pullman Strike emphasized the un-Americanness of the strikers and the loyalty of state militias and regular soldiers. Publications contrasted the manly independence of federal troops against the primitive collectivism of the foreign mob. The state, a bastion of Anglo supremacy, appeared in a favorable light, while alternative, immigrant- and cooperative-centered stories received little real attention.

America Besieged

Frederic Remington's report from Chicago documented a nightmare vision of America under attack by "a malodorous crowd of anarchistic foreign trash."[10] Remington's frightened tirade was not an exceptionally alarmist opinion for the times. The 1890s were an anxious time for many middle-class Anglo Americans. These years saw "the psychic crisis of the 1890s," in Richard Hofstadter's well-known formulation.[11] The post–Civil War decades witnessed the ascent of massive units of capital, aggressive

[9]On news framing, see Stephen Reese et al., *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, NJ, 2001); Theodore Glasser, ed., *The Idea of Public Journalism* (New York, 1999), xvi; Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York, 1974); Stanley J. Baran, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA, 2000); Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1988). Also Allan Rachlin, *News as Hegemonic Reality: American Political Culture and the Framing of News Accounts* (New York, 1988); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York, 1978); Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News* (Philadelphia, 1981).

[10]Remington, "Chicago under the Mob."

[11]Richard Hofstadter, "Manifest Destiny and the Philippines" in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York, 1965), 148.

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corporations that changed the nature of the relationship between workers and owners. Although the rise of large firms was part of a process that had started much earlier, it was not until the 1870s (in the midst of a massive depression) that the public was first truly awakened to a burgeoning world starkly at odds with the bucolic dream of Jeffersonian democracy. Massive strikes, beginning with the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and continuing through the Great Upheaval of the mid-1880s, alerted the middle class to the presence of a large, increasingly ethnic and class-conscious labor movement. By the time the economy went sour in 1893, the proportion of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had overtaken the older immigration from northern and western Europe. It was more and more apparent that these dramatic societal changes challenged national identity.[12]

Crafting a new national identity meant facing uncomfortable questions. Could Americans reconcile their basic values with the urban jungles sprouting up within the pastoral garden (to borrow Leo Marx's term) of democracy? Could they fit the dream of upward mobility into an era of impersonal corporate ascension? Further, how could American society accommodate a national, active, and increasingly well-organized labor movement? The stream of seemingly alien "new immigrants" compounded these fears of unwelcome social change. To meet these perceived challenges, white, middle-class Americans increasingly celebrated a national identity that was exclusionary and racially distinct.[13]

As evidenced by the emergence of nationalistic organizations bent on defining citizenship as something available only to a particular category of white America—native-born Anglos, immigrants from European countries not associated with anarchism and socialism (such as Germany)—it is clear that the psychic boundaries of nationhood needed reinforcement and patrol. Groups like the American Protective Association, the Order of Native Americans, the Patriotic League of the Revolution, the American Patriotic League, and the Daughters of the American Revolution worked diligently to identify and protect the true spirit of the nation. These organizations published writings, organized publicly, and lobbied politicians in an effort to resist the influence of unwelcome immigrants.[14]

The project of such nationalist groups reflects the exclusionary process involved in the fabrication of national identity. Historian Peter Sahlins

[12]On the 1877 Railroad Strike, Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (1959, repr. Chicago, 1970); Philip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York, 1977) and David O. Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago, 1999). For an overview of the Great Upheaval of the 1880s, Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston, 1997).

[13]Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964). Philip Perlmutter, *Divided We Fall: A History of Ethnic, Religious, and Racial Prejudice in America* (Ames, IA, 1992), 166–77.

[14]Thomas J. Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration, 1820–1930* (Boston, 1975), ch. 7.

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argues, "National Identity is a socially constructed and continuous process of defining 'friend' and 'enemy.'"[15] Enemies of the state offer not only an invasive presence that requires a unified polity to resist, but also represent an Other against which to define oneself and thus develop a meaningful civic identity. If finding clear enemies from within proved elusive in the 1890s—for instance, how to criticize monopoly and simultaneously celebrate American economic success—the notion of a creeping threat from foreign shores proved irresistible. Non-English-speaking immigrants, who were associated with foreign ideas of socialism and anarchism, served as popular placeholders for unspoken fears of catastrophic social change.

To fully grasp the power of this exclusionary process and its significance in 1894, it is essential to understand that the strength of nationalist sentiment arises from its relation to citizens' conceptions of self. Associating oneself on a personal level with a nation means making an emotional connection, a connection to a certain *idea* of what that nation is and a sense of protectiveness about it.[16] A tenuous and artificial construction, national identity requires regular replenishment and rediscovery. Often this leads to essentialist connections between nation and race. As Anthony Marx argues, exclusionary ethnic nationalism is not just a curse of non-Western countries—it is part of the fabric of nationalist identity throughout the West.[17] In the United States, a country ostensibly born of immigrant populations with a strong civic narrative, a vocal coterie of journalists, politicians, laborers, and reformers regularly put forth racial, exclusive definitions of patriotic worth.

In the late nineteenth century, the connection between the civic ideals of Americanness (liberty, freedom, equality, and so forth) and a nativist, racial ideal took a virulent form. Frederic Remington's America was a place with the enemies not just at the gates, but already circulating throughout the population. In his *Harper's* pieces, Remington quoted a soldier noticing, "in his simple way, 'Say do you know them things ain't human?—before God I don't think they are men.'" Privately, Remington wrote about "the rubbish of the earth" populating the country, people such as the "nasty" Jews, the "stinking" Russians, the "injuns," and the "Polacks."[18] At the time, Josiah Strong's bestseller *Our Country* (which for a time outsold everything but the Bible) referred to immigration as one of the "seven great perils" facing the nation.[19] Members of the privileged classes were far from the only people

[15]Sahlins, *Boundaries*, 270–71.

[16]As Ross Poole aptly puts it, "The nation is not just a form of consciousness, it is also a form of *self*-consciousness." Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London, 1999), 12.

[17]Marx, *Faith in Nation.*

[18]Quoted in McCullough, "Remington—The Man," 28–29.

[19]Other "great perils" that Strong warned of, including Catholicism, socialism, urbaniza-

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expressing such attitudes. At times, business leaders visibly welcomed immigrants as cheap labor, while working-class leaders vehemently resisted the invading "hordes."[20]

In the 1890s, nationalist zeal often depended upon nativist exclusion. Combining pledges, conspicuous displays of flags and patriotic paraphernalia, and new organizations that linked members to the nation's founders, this ideology placed a premium on separating native Americans from unworthy imports. States such as Pennsylvania passed legislation excluding aliens from work on public projects, while others passed laws levying special taxes on immigrant laborers and even prohibited employment altogether for immigrants who had not yet declared their intention to become citizens. Congressmen stirred their electorates by warning that the foreign horde would soon overwhelm the nation if not checked.

For its part, the labor movement played into this xenophobia to a considerable extent. Since 1881, organized labor had demanded legislation to restrict immigration, targeting their ire at immigrants from China and southern and eastern Europe. The *Railroad Trainmen's Journal* (a conservative craft-union mouthpiece) reprinted a *Chautauquan* article in 1893 on "The Immigrant Question." The article remarked that "English, Irish, Welsh, Germans and Scandinavians, those nationalities which have furnished us types of noble patriots and done so much toward building up the nation, are falling off, relatively, as immigrants, while the nationalities of southeastern Europe, which have not held their own in the race struggle, which have played a declining part in the historic drama, have recruited the incoming ranks with vast reinforcements." The Knights of Labor argued for forcible removal of such immigrants. The American Federation of Labor attacked the "hordes of slavish, ignorant and unassimilable foreigners," who came ashore and threatened social stability and depressed wages. Both the Knights and the AFL would team up with the Immigration Restriction League in supporting literacy requirement laws and signing the League's xenophobic manifesto.[21]

Such nativist sentiment was ingrained in popular culture by 1894. Nativism flowered at the end of the nineteenth century, however, based on deep roots long watered by distrust and political agitation. Half a century

tion, and alcoholism, were also connected to immigration in this period. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York, 1885). As Anthony Marx argues, nationalist identity has been historically "consolidated from below and harnessed from above." Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 194. On the prevalence of negative ethnic stereotypes in popular fiction in the 1890s, see Katrina Irving, *Immigrant Mothers: Narratives of Race and Maternity, 1890–1925* (Urbana, 2000).

[20]See Catherine Collomp, "Unions, Civics, and National Identity: Organized Labor's Reaction to Immigration, 1881–1897," *Labor History* 29 (Fall 1988): 450–74.

[21]Noble Conby, "The Immigrant Question," repr. in *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, Jan. 1893,

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before, the American (or Know-Nothing) Party had rallied for an Anglo-Protestant nationality in the face of Irish Catholic immigrants, proving successful in a number of state and local elections across the country. Nineteenth-century European revolutions and radical ideologies further inspired established Americans to regard certain groups of newcomers with distrust. The *Chicago Tribune* rallied for this cause in its exhortations in the 1880s against the "German conquest" of the city. The Haymarket bombing of 1886 exacerbated this rhetoric, with the *New York Tribune* depicting the "masses of ignorant foreigners" as "magazines of explosives" ready to destruct with enough encouragement from radical demagogues.[22] Other examples of such inspired xenophobia abound: anti-Chinese agitation in the West, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism (often aimed at eastern European Jews), anticommunist agitation growing out of the French Commune of 1871, and so on.[23]

Such xenophobic cinders circulated in the media and in politics throughout the century, to be fanned to a bright flame in moments of apparent crisis. The 1890s, with the changing economic and demographic shifts, especially in the cities, would provide such a crisis. This is not to say that everyone believed the same things about immigrants. It is impossible to know what the typical nineteenth-century American felt about such matters. What is certain is that high-profile public voices, with access to the major media outlets (especially via the Associated Press), blared a near-continuous tocsin of warning about the direction in which the republic was heading. Specifically, a number of major periodicals (the *New York Times, New York Herald, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Examiner, Harper's Weekly, North American Review, Nation,* and others), social critics (such as Josiah Strong), union leaders (including Samuel Gompers and Terence Powderly), and politicians (such as President Grover Cleveland, who blamed labor conflict on foreign agitators, though he resisted outright immigration restriction) all at one point or another articulated a national identity imperiled by foreigners.[24] Such xenophobia would eventually contribute to the U.S. decision to oust

98–99; proceedings of 1890 AFL convention, quoted in Catherine Collomp, "Unions, Civics, and National Identity," 454, also 456.

[22]John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (1955; repr. New York, 1963), 4; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), 126.

[23]See, for instance, Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1995); Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Robert Rockaway and Arnon Gutfeld, "Demonic Images of the Jew in the Nineteenth Century United States," *Jewish American History* 89 (Dec. 2002): 355–81; Mark Philip Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

[24]Importantly, they did not all agree on *which* groups were most dangerous. Rather, the culprit was often the nebulous "foreigners."

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Spain from Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 in an effort to rid the Western Hemisphere of a foreign presence.[25] In 1894 this zeal would help to animate the movement to crush the country's first major industrial union.

The Forces at Battle

The ingredients of late nineteenth-century national identity—democracy, race, masculinity, ethnicity, patriotism—brewed to a boil in 1894. The mainstream media largely depicted the Pullman Strike as an epic battle for survival, for both commerce and the American soul. The two men at the front of each side in the strike, one a business mogul, the other a charismatic labor leader, each embodied a particular version of identity. Labor's vision did not prevail, although capital's victory was hardly unequivocal and uncontested.

George Mortimer Pullman was a complex character. He desired, in his own words, to construct a new, harmonious framework for management-worker relations "and thus a new era will be introduced into the history of labor." The model industrial town south of Chicago that he sponsored, where discontent built quietly for years before the 1894 strike, was a clean, well-organized, liquor-free (with the exception of the hotel lounge available to its prosperous clientele), and scrupulously homogenous village. Pullman worked ceaselessly to publicize his creation, not just to boost his company's image or to attract workers, but because he believed he was setting an example. During the World's Fair of 1893 held in Chicago, he distributed thousands of free copies of pro-Pullman literature, including works titled *The Story of Pullman* and *The Town of Pullman*. These books celebrated the orderly splendor of his model town in pictures and easy-to-read prose. Special trains took visitors from the fairgrounds to the model town. He became one of the most high-profile capitalists in America.[26]

At the core of George Pullman's belief system existed a fear shared by millions of Americans—the fear of alien invasion. At this time, waves of new immigrants had been arriving, men and women who spoke little English, dressed differently, ate different foods, and worshipped a different version of their God. They came in huge numbers, filling the cities and initiating significant demographic changes. Many Americans blessed with the fortune of having been born on this side of the Atlantic or belonging to less alien-seeming stock (such as the British) believed that these newcomers had

[25]Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 71–74; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2002). On race and nationalism in the 1890s, see Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (Baton Rouge, 2005), ch. 7.

[26]Papke, *Pullman Case*, ch. 1. It must be noted that Pullman was not alone in his hope for his city. As Carl Smith notes, "Virtually all of the early commentary on the town by outsiders made, if anything, even greater claims for Pullman's achievement than he himself did." Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 184.

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no conception of American democracy and were inherently prone to violence and lifelong poverty. George Pullman reflected this attitude himself, favoring fair-haired Northern Europeans and so-called "buckwheats" from rural America to serve in his employ.[27]

If Pullman represented one major response to changing times, Eugene Debs, leader of the ARU, represented another. Debs was born in Indiana, a native son whose upbringing was intimately connected with the small-town life of the Midwest. Like Pullman, Debs witnessed his bucolic America disintegrating under the intense forces associated with capitalist development. Unlike Pullman, Debs's dream of national recovery involved the working class taking the initiative in remaking the country along democratic, cooperative lines. After years of involvement with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, Debs went on to organize and lead the largest industrial union yet seen in the country.[28]

The American Railway Union had sprung into existence as a result of a drive to gather all railroad workers into a single union. While the idea of one big workers' organization stretched back at least several decades to the Knights of Labor, the ARU was different. A true industrial union, the ARU aimed at uniting all workers (except blacks) within a single industry. Its president had a gift for passionate appeal and thrived in the limelight. Debs believed that labor would lose the industrial war without large, broad organizations like the ARU. His infectious eloquence threatened the enemies of his cause. Debs saw a massive union across craft lines as an "army [that] would be impregnable. No corporation would assail it." It would be so powerful that it would consign the whole idea of the strike to "the relic chamber of the past." Under Debs's leadership, the ARU grew rapidly following a successful walkout against the Great Northern Railroad in April–May of 1894. With some 150,000 members in an industry where workers could readily communicate over large distances, the ARU represented a new challenge to capitalist hegemony. In June 1894, in the middle of the ARU's first national convention, which happened to meet in Chicago, the Pullman strikers asked the ARU for assistance in their strike, deadlocked since its commencement on May 11. After initial hesitancy, Debs agreed to help the strikers at the railroad car plant, and on June 26, 1894, the ARU's boycott of Pullman Palace cars began.[29]

[27]Notably, Pullman also hired African Americans as porters. Papke, *Pullman Case*, 12. Pullman sought to transform the workers themselves, to "bring out the highest and best there is in them," according to a celebratory corporate history. Quoted from [Doty?] *The Story of Pullman* in Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 195.

[28]On Debs's life, see Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, 1982); Ray Ginger, *Eugene V. Debs: A Biography* (New York, 1949); David Karsner, *Debs: His Authorized Life and Letters* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920).

[29]On Debs and the strike, see Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs,* ch. 5.

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The ARU's self-proclaimed martial character played into media depictions of the organization as spearheading an attack against America. Debs himself explained on June 16 that if the Pullman officials declined a "peaceable settlement...I am in favor of declaring war on the Pullman company and putting every man we have in the field to fight it to the finish."[30] Once the ARU announced its intentions, major newspapers inflated the decision into something much more insidious: the inauguration of a national struggle between the union and the state. As the *New York World* explained, Eugene Debs's American Railroad Union had declared "open war against the Government and against society."[31]

Configuring the boycott and resulting strike wave as a battle was not unique to the Pullman Strike; it was consistent with the spirit of strike analysis in the late 1800s and thus no stretch of the journalistic imagination. Ever since the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, mass strikes at times generated impressive violence and for many Americans took on the frightening aspect of war. The press would depict strikers as disciplined soldiers fighting a battle against the organized forces of capital. Strikers were said to be organized into "ranks," "marching" to take the "field" in an orderly fashion even if little order actually existed. Strike leaders appeared in the press as generals.[32] Given the magnitude to which the Pullman Strike grew with the declaration of a boycott, Eugene Debs seemed to be the most powerful labor general the nation had yet seen. Because the national economy relied on the consistent transportation of goods and fuel through Chicago to different regions, the refusal of laborers to handle trains with omnipresent Pullman cars might turn the boycott into the largest strike on record. Debs, it seemed to a great many observers, held unprecedented power.

Once the boycott began, events quickly escalated, as workers refused to attach Pullman cars to trains and then struck when ordered to do so. The *New York Times* made the significance of the ARU's decision clear: "While the boycott is ostensibly declared as a demonstration of sympathy in behalf of the strikers in the Pullman shop, it in reality will be a struggle between the greatest and most powerful railroad labor organization and the entire railroad capital." The *Baltimore Sun* explained to its audience on the same day, "If it were simply a matter between employer and employe, the public might let them settle it for themselves. But it is not. The public are deeply concerned, and the people have the right to insist upon a remedy if one can be found."[33] Indeed, the sides did quickly coalesce—soon after the strike

[30]"To the Bitter End," *Chicago Times*, June 16, 1894.

[31]"War Upon Society," *New York World*, July 2, 1894.

[32]See Troy Rondinone, "'History Repeats Itself': The Civil War and the Meaning of Labor Conflict in the Late Nineteenth Century," *American Quarterly* 59 (June 2007): 397–419.

[33]*New York Times*, June 27, 1894; *Baltimore Sun*, June 27, 1894.

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began, the railroads united behind the General Manager's Association, an entity created during the Great Upheaval in 1886 to rationalize the transportation process and to counter the influence of organized labor. The largest industrial union now faced the most coordinated alliance of capitalists.

Yet strike coverage was not entirely antiunion at the outset. George Pullman's benevolent reputation had been questioned for years. In 1894, the media held him at least partly responsible for the hostility of his workers. Area newspapers such as the *Chicago Inter Ocean,* the *Chicago Times,* and the *Chicago Herald* criticized him for contributing to the suffering of his employees during the ongoing depression. The *Boston Transcript* proclaimed that "public opinion" sided against George Pullman for refusing to allow even the question of arbitration to be discussed. News correspondent Nellie Bly of the *New York World* went to Pullman town to write a series of articles sympathetic to the plight of the workers. She explained that workers' deep resentment of Pullman resulted from his own hubris: "No man ever had a better chance to benefit mankind than had Pullman. No man deserves more the condemnation of the world." The *Chicago Daily News* even set up a store in town to provide the strikers with basic supplies for survival.[34]

Such comments underscore the ambiguous nature of American nationalism as it applied to this crisis and press treatment of it. The large newspapers were published by capitalists who, however subtly, influenced the course of coverage and for the most part believed that unions were dangerous. Still, it was no given that all labor publicity would be negative or that the press would interpret the labor side as less patriotic than an autocratic, unresponsive company. Similarly, ostensibly "pro-labor" editors might suddenly turn against unions and let their staff know as much. For example, when Joseph Pulitzer, the "hands-on" owner of the *New York World* who supported the Homestead strikers in 1892, read an op-ed piece in his newspaper that supported Debs in his defiance of the Cleveland administration's intervention, he summoned the offending journalist to his office. He berated him, demanding that he acknowledge his erroneous judgment. The reporter did not back down, and he could not be fired by dint of his union contract. Pulitzer could only ban him from writing further editorials. Even with this accomplished, Pulitzer's paper still did not provide monolithically negative coverage of the strikers. Nellie Bly, the reporter sent by Pulitzer to cover the strike, explained in the *World* that the strikers "are not firebrands; they are not murderers and rioters; they are not Anarchists. They are quiet, peaceful men who have suffered beneath the heel of the most heartless

[34]A survey of the press and the strike appears in Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, ch. 13; *New York Times*, July 1, 1894; *New York World*, July 12, 1894.

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coward it has ever been my misfortune to hear of." Yet even as she wrote this, other editorials in the *World* condemned the strikers.[35]

Other periodicals similarly found owner ideology influencing, though not entirely directing, strike coverage. The three major Chicago papers, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Times*, and *Chicago Daily News*, were all owned by wealthy, politically sensitive businessmen who were, on some level, dedicated to the social harmony that made things safe for business. The *Tribune*, owned by prominent, conservative Republican businessman Joseph Medill, was the most reactionary, making sure that Debs was referred to as "Dictator Debs" and the strikers strongly associated with anarchism. The *Daily News* was a bit more sympathetic, having been founded by a pro-reform, community-minded entrepreneur and published in the 1890s by nonpartisan businessman Victor Lawson. The *Times*, on the other hand, was consistently pro-striker, being under the direction of popular-minded Democrat Carter Harrison II. Despite these differences, as David Paul Nord argues in his study of these three periodicals in the late nineteenth century, during the Pullman Strike all three newspapers adhered to a "firm commitment to commercial order, social harmony, and social control."[36] From Nord's study, plus what is known about Pulitzer's actions during the strike, one can see that despite individual differences that affected coverage in specific papers, an overall story emerged in the press that the nation was confronted with a serious challenge to the social order.

* * *

Despite occasional journalistic sympathy, within days after the inauguration of the ARU boycott of the Pullman Company, the press began ramping up considerable pressure on Debs. The boycott inspired numerous strikes throughout the West and Midwest, and attempts to move trains often failed in the face of belligerent efforts by organized and intransigent workers. American business, so intimately connected to the rails, seemed imperiled by the power of the ARU and its leader. Debs tried to maintain support with a characteristic public appeal. In an eloquent call to arms that included references to Abraham Lincoln, manhood, the "great public," and the striving of labor for "living wages," Debs explained that the strike had "developed into a contest between the producing classes and the money power." He felt that the strike had indeed become a climactic battle, but from his perspective labor represented the side of good while the railroad corpora-

[35]Denis Brian, *Pulitzer: A Life* (New York, 2001), 178–79.

[36]David Paul Nord, "The Business Values of American Newspapers: The Nineteenth-Century Watershed," ch. 6 in *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana, 2001), 143.

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tions signified the powers of corruption and greed.[37]

The largest newspapers printed Debs's speech on the front page. He had tapped into the rich rhetorical vein of nineteenth-century republicanism and white men's rights, expounding on the sublime importance of this strike as a great stand against unfettered capitalism. While his exegesis did make clear to the public his moral stand, when combined with the violence that quickly ensued and the media's presentation of the strike as a battle, it also provided fuel for the media's central story of an un-American assault on industry. The gist of the coverage turned not on whether the strike had been a justifiable endeavor but instead on the frightening (and well-selling) story of a labor war on a national scale. Debs now more than ever seemed the commanding general, issuing a call for action to his working-class troops.[38]

Editors instantly recognized the special nature of this strike. The standard style of mass strike reportage, which placed a premium on charges, marches, volleys, and conquests, reached new levels of extravagance in July 1894. On July 2, the antiunion *Chicago Tribune* proclaimed, "Strike Is Now War." Later in the issue, it elaborated that the violence currently breaking out between the strikers and the militia reflected on the nature of all strikes, which were in actuality a "kind of warfare that cannot be carried on peacefully for more than a few days."[39] Other periodicals less inclined to make such blanket statements quoted Debs and followed brusquely with announcements that the strike had become the ultimate battle between the largest capitalists and all of organized labor. The *Journal of Political Economy* later pointed out that the Pullman Strike stirred far more public alarm than had the 1877 Railroad Strike, the Southwest Strike, and the Homestead battle. In a piece in the *Journal* titled "Are We Awakened?," University of Chicago professor H. von Holst explained that the strike was an act of "organized labor...declaring war to the knife upon the central principle of the government of law."[40]

Some labor leaders threw fuel on the fire. Illinois State Federation of Labor president M. H. Madden announced, "We all feel that in fighting any battle against the Pullman company we are aiming at the very head and front of monopoly and plutocracy...As the question now stands it will be solved only by a struggle to the end to demonstrate which has more coherency, capital or labor." Grand Master Workman James R. Sovereign of the Knights of Labor urged a general strike for all of Chicago. Populist leader Moses Oppenheimer declared that the "working class desire to assert that they are

[37]*New York World*, July 4, 5, 1894.

[38]The *New York Times* ominously titled one piece "Debs Talks Wildly of Civil War," *New York Times*, July 5, 1894.

[39]*Chicago Tribune*, July 2, 1894.

[40]H. von Holst, "Are We Awakened?" *Journal of Political Economy* 2 (Sept. 1894): 487, 498.

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willing to rebel against the arrogance of the monopolists....This is no longer a strike—it is the great Western rebellion."[41]

As strikes quickly spread from city to city and tied up rail traffic across the Midwest, the press emphasized that this was more than a battle between a union and the corporate interests; it was an assault against America itself. An editorial in the *Chicago Evening Journal* explained, "When a strike becomes a war then every man must declare to whom he owes allegiance." While during peace times the "laborer" and "capitalist" might cling to "union" or "wealth," "when it comes to war every American...will enlist for American liberty." "All classes," the *Evening Journal* insisted, needed to make up their minds whether they would be "Americans or Anarchists." When President Cleveland sent in federal troops under the rationale of securing the safe transport of the mail and violence ensued, the majority of the mainstream media demonized the ARU as fomenter of an uprising against federal authority and the public. When Illinois governor John Peter Altgeld refused to send in the National Guard, the press accused him of being "anarchistic" and the "friend and champion of disorder."[42]

Framing the Strike

The negative treatment of Altgeld during the strike offers a key to understanding the framing process by which much of the popular media connected the disorder with foreignness. Altgeld, a Prussian-born immigrant, had pronounced pro-labor and social reformist sympathies that seemed like German socialism to his critics. After he pardoned the three surviving men accused of involvement in the infamous Haymarket affair, pointedly reminding critics that no connection had ever been demonstrated between the men and the bomb, the *Washington Post* criticized the governor as "an alien" with "little or no stake in the problem of American evolution."[43] During the Pullman Strike, the press rarely missed an opportunity to link Altgeld with the foreign ideology of anarchism. The *New York Times* explained that he was "thickheaded and anarchistic" with no concept of "law and order." The *Chicago Tribune* editorialized that he was a "sympathizer with riot, with violence, with anarchy." The *Chicago Evening Journal* regret-

[41]Quoted in the *New York World*, July 13, 1894. At the same meeting, the crowd hissed at reformer Henry George for claiming that he was against strikes. Importantly, some condemned the strike, such as former Knights of Labor grand workman Terence Powderly, who explained that this strike was due to a power struggle between Debs and Pullman over who should control the rails. Powderly explained, "Neither Mr. Pullman nor Mr. Debs should be the arbiter in this matter, but those who stand higher—the great American People"; quoted in "Powderly Condemns Strikes," *New York Times*, July 2, 1894.

[42]*New York Times*, July 7, 1894; Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, 191–93.

[43]Quoted in Ray Ginger, *Altgeld's America: The Lincoln Ideal Versus Changing Realities* (1958; repr. Chicago, 1965), 85

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ted that Illinois "will have to endure the ignominy of having a demagogue and anarchist as its chief magistrate." *Harper's Weekly* concurred that Altgeld sided with the rioters to get their votes, in effect pandering to the foreign voting elements of Chicago and elsewhere.[44]

This fear of anarchistic foreignness provided the key to interpreting nationalist sentiment expressed by the press during the Pullman Strike. One term that flows throughout the coverage is "mob," an expression that by this time often connoted mindless hordes of "aliens" insistent on bringing about the decidedly un-American state of affairs known as anarchy. Back in the 1880s, expressing a common if empirically incorrect perception, the journal *Public Opinion* stated plainly, "There is no such thing as an American anarchist."[45] In July 1894, in a piece entitled "Fired Point-Blank into the Mob," Pulitzer's *New York World* explained, "Mob rule was to-day checked by bullets. The riotous foreigners who have embraced the opportunity for disorder which the strike afforded were shot and bayoneted without mercy." In this article, a number of interconnected themes appeared. In a "battle" between order and anarchy, Company C of the Second Regiment faced "a mob...encountered in force." Both words and images depicted a foreign mob: An accompanying illustration showed a bearded, haggard foreigner shaking his fist at tidy, well-appointed, and well-armed soldiers riding on a train (itself a symbol of industrial America). A list of casualties accompanied the narrative. The writer celebrated the police who "held their ground" in the face this anarchistic mob.[46]

Other examples of such framing abound, in which the intermingling of foreignness, mobbery, violence, and anarchy create a picture of social disorder that requires an immediate, patriotic response from the public. One day's issue of the *Chicago Tribune* referred to Debs as a "dictator" (which suggests foreign, undemocratic governments) controlling a "mob" attempting an "Insurrection Against the Government." The strike had become "a war" for "American liberty." It was therefore up to "every man...to declare to whom he owes allegiance." Quite simply, "all classes" needed to make up their minds whether they will be "Americans or Anarchists."[47] Simplifying the events in such a way, the press functioned to curtail the varieties of interpretation and confine the national dialogue into "us versus them" parameters.

Configuring the strike as a treasonous attack against the United States and its people and making Debs appear to be the leader of a vicious mass of invading foreigners involved connecting the violence and the ARU to soci-

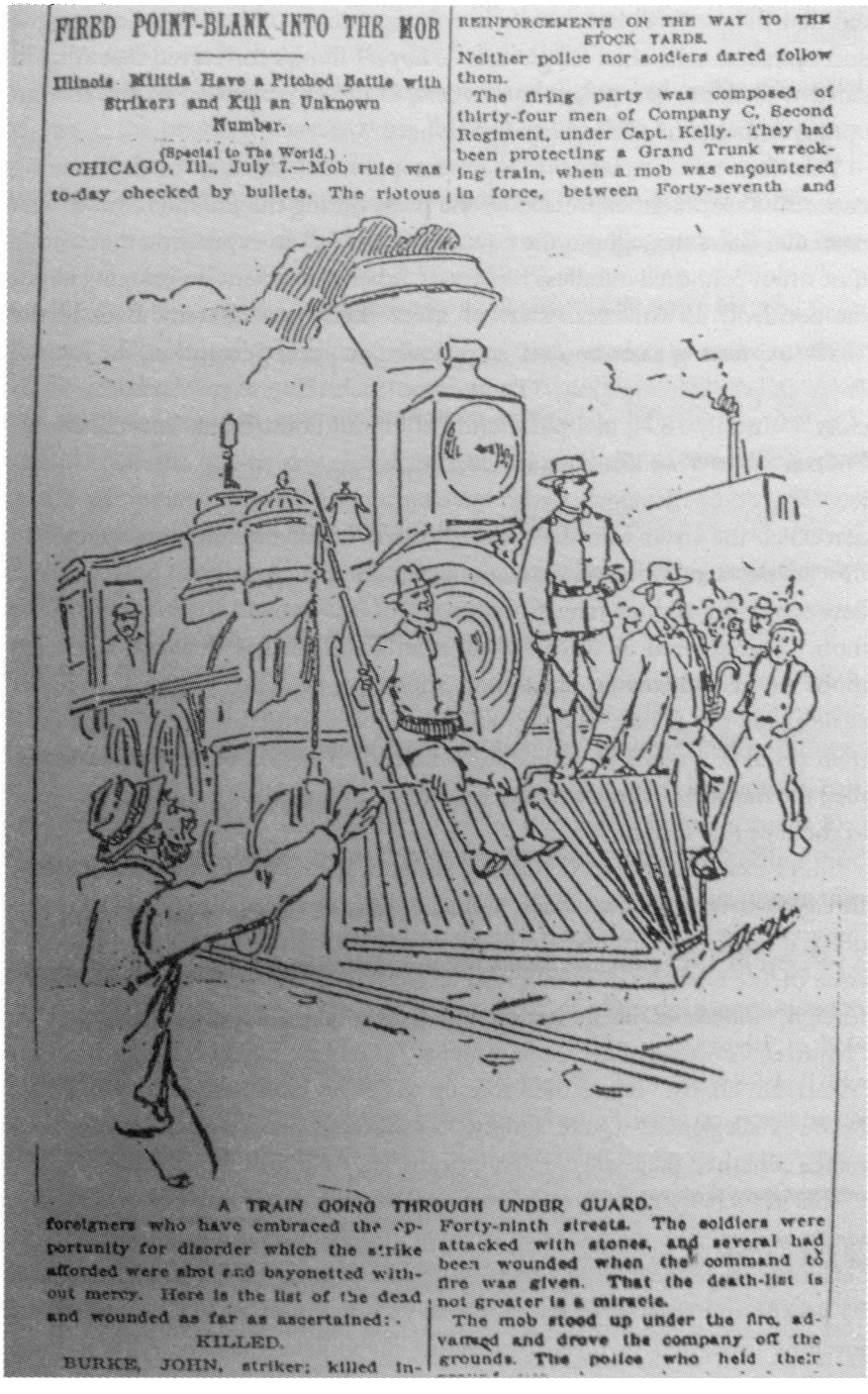
[44]*New York Times*, July 7, 1894; *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 1894; *Chicago Evening Journal* and *Harper's Weekly*, quoted in Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike*, 192–93.

[45]Quoted in Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 55.

[46]"Fired Point-Blank into the Mob," *New York World*, July 8, 1894.

[47]*Chicago Tribune*, July 3, 1894.

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FIRED POINT-BLANK INTO THE MOB

Illinois Militia Have a Pitched Battle with Strikers and Kill an Unknown Number.

(Special to The World.)

CHICAGO, Ill., July 7.—Mob rule was to-day checked by bullets. The riotous

REINFORCEMENTS ON THE WAY TO THE STOCK YARDS.

Neither police nor soldiers dared follow them.

The firing party was composed of thirty-four men of Company C, Second Regiment, under Capt. Kelly. They had been protecting a Grand Trunk wrecking train, when a mob was encountered in force, between Forty-seventh and

A TRAIN GOING THROUGH UNDER GUARD.

foreigners who have embraced the opportunity for disorder which the strike afforded were shot and bayonetted without mercy. Here is the list of the dead and wounded as far as ascertained:

KILLED.

BURKE, JOHN, striker; killed in-

Forty-ninth streets. The soldiers were attacked with stones, and several had been wounded when the command to fire was given. That the death-list is not greater is a miracle.

The mob stood up under the fire, advanced and drove the company off the grounds. The police who held their

Figure 2: *New York World,* July 8, 1894. In this image, a stolid, clean-cut group of soldiers literally projects from a locomotive as a dirty, unkempt mob representative shakes his fist. The mob in the background is blurred and indistinct.

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ety's dangerous immigrant elements. The worst violence of the strike took place in and around Chicago, an entrepôt of immigrant groups such as Hungarians, Germans, and Poles. Chicago's strikers were "a mass of evil, angry, hungry foreigners," explained a letter to the editor in the *New York World*, which further quoted a "prominent railroad man" as saying that Debs himself used savage "Indian methods" to wage his battle against society. Frederic Remington suggested that "real," native workingmen wished that the occupying soldiers would kill the foreigners responsible for the violence. He explained that "the soldier mind doesn't understand the Hungarian or Polack, or whatever the stuff is." The *New York Times* quoted a popular Methodist minister preaching to his congregation that "when the foreigner comes and insists upon importing with him institutions inimical to the institutions purchased by the blood of patriots, I say leave those institutions behind, or get back to the soil where they are indigenous."[48]

This rebellion of aliens, led by a misguided and dangerous unionist, inspired much overwrought journalism. The *Washington Post* wrote of "mob rule" in Chicago.[49] *Harper's Weekly*, in general a moderate, middle-class journal, feared that "the nation is fighting for its own existence just as truly as in suppressing the great rebellion." The ostensibly pro-labor *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, which found Debs's industrial union far too inclusive of the dangerous and unskilled foreign element, explained that the Pullman Strike was in actuality a "civil war" of "the worst kind. Not a sectional but a class war."[50]

While pro-labor periodicals offered frames of analysis that favored the strikers, they still found themselves trapped by the prevailing language that depicted the strike as a battle between foreign influence and Americanism. The *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, hostile to the ARU for its having robbed the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen of membership, sympathized with the strikers but denounced Debs's tactics as senseless. The *Boston Labor Leader* agreed that while backed by a "chivalrous purpose," the ARU's disastrous "mighty battle" revealed mainly the superiority of traditional craft unionism to Debs's experiment in industrial unionism.[51] The *Chicago Times*, highly critical of Pullman, blamed the railroads for hiring foreigners in the first place, but also chastised the major newspapers for "striving to settle the issue with bayonets and Gatling guns," explaining that its conservative competitors are

[48]*New York World*, July 10, 1894; Remington, "Chicago Under the Mob" *Harper's Weekly*, July 21, 1894. "Trades Unions Blamed," *New York Times*, July 23, 1894. Most newspapers recognized Chicago to be the "principal theater of action," in the words of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

[49]*Washington Post*, July 6, 1894.

[50]*Harper's Weekly*, July 7, 1894; *Chicago Evening Post* quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, July 3, 1894; *Nation*, July 19, 1894; *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, Sept. 1894.

[51]*Railroad Trainmen's Journal* Aug., Sept., Oct., 1894; *Boston Labor Leader* quoted in *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, Sept. 1894.

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"traitors to the republic and the most execrable of all the agents of anarchy."[52]

Also on the pro-union side of the equation was the *Arena*, a popular reformist journal that condemned "all the Tory plutocratic newspapers" that denounced the union's struggle. In several articles, the *Arena* argued that the ARU operated according to the most honorable principles. At one point it compared the Pullman boycott to the Sons of Liberty's boycott of British goods in 1773. The *San Francisco Examiner*, published by the idiosyncratic radical William Randolph Hearst and located in a city where the powerful Southern Pacific Railroad was feared as a monopolistic "octopus," likewise depicted Chicago's railroads as "aristocratic and autocratic." At one point, the *Examiner* quoted a soldier as saying, "If we had to fight Indians or a common enemy there would be some fun and excitement, but this idea of shooting down American citizens simply because they are on strike for what they consider to be their rights is a horse of another color."[53] Still, as violence escalated, the *Examiner* increasingly blamed both the "mob" and the railroads for the violence. Even more favorable to the strike for obvious reasons, the ARU's own *Railway Times* took every opportunity to accuse the corporations of importing foreign autocratic ideals and to praise the brave and manly strikers.[54]

Despite such efforts to create an alternative narrative, labor leaders understood that the press held the key to its future and that this strike was clearly being presented as a foreign attack on the republic. At an American Federation of Labor conference held at the Briggs House in Chicago, much of the discussion revolved around the public image of labor and the effect of the Pullman Strike on the union movement.[55] In a public statement that supported the Pullman strikers while denying support for a sympathy strike, the AFL explained that the media had falsely painted the "working classes [as] now arrayed in open hostility to Federal authority."[56] Recognizing the damage that bad press did to their cause, the ARU boycotted several major papers in Chicago. Unlike previous labor boycotts of newspapers, this one had nothing to do with the labor practices of the papers themselves but instead of the antiunion content of the writing.[57]

[52]*Chicago Times*, July 3, 1894.

[53]*San Francisco Examiner*, June 30, July 3, 1894.

[54]*Arena*, Sept. 1894; *Railway Times*, Aug., Sept. 1894.

[55]"Proceedings on the Briggs Conference," *American Federationist*, Aug. 1894, 131–33; Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, 228.

[56]*Washington Post*, July 14, 1894. Citing "complications" around the "present crisis" that were "so grave in nature that we cannot advise a course which would but add to the general confusion," the AFL declined to join the strike.

[57]The pro-labor *Chicago Times* recognized the antiunion slant of most coverage in a blunt-

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Regardless of the pro-union countercurrents, the tide of the generally hostile press operated to undermine the strike and Debs's ambitions for a permanent, union-led solution to the problems posed by industrial capitalism. By scripting the Pullman Strike as a battle in which the security of the nation itself was at stake, the media channeled nationalism into a powerful weapon to be used against industrial working-class solidarity. Perhaps the most obvious example of this process could be seen in the imagery of Uncle Sam during the strike. Uncle Sam, a figure who since the early nineteenth century had personified the federal government, played a key role in embodying editorial opinion toward the supposed dangers of the ARU's actions. As Debs called on his constituency to fight the General Manager's Association, the image of a vengeful, rail thin, Lincolnesque Uncle Sam appeared regularly in major newspapers to represent a righteous, reactionary federal response.[58]

In many cartoons, an indignant Uncle Sam engaged in retaliatory violence, for example by picking up a scruffy striker by the nape of the neck or lighting a fuse on a "Debs" stick of dynamite. Cartoonists also portrayed Uncle Sam as a disciplinarian father about to spank an infantilized Debs. Standing in for the combined public/federal interest, Uncle Sam served as signifier of government-sanctioned order. Like Remington's soldiers, he was also the epitome of manliness, bravely holding his own against bomb-throwing, shadowy (thus unmanly) Others.[59] The appropriation of this icon of patriotism for strike suppression reflected the media's depiction of patriotism as a force for social order. The flag itself became a point of solidarity much used by the media to rally support for the antistrike injunction sought by the Cleveland administration. In response to the apparent popularity of pro-Debs white lapel pins, some people began to wear red, white, and blue pins, an act praised roundly in the press. The *Wheeling Intelligencer* editorialized, "This wearing of Old Glory is all right. The people mean business." The *Pittsburgh Dispatch* concurred, explaining further that the wearing of a white pin in itself amounted to an "Assault on Uncle Sam." The *St. Paul Globe* pro-

ly titled article, "Lies Are Too Numerous," July 3, 1894. In response to the union boycott of the press, the *New Orleans Picayune* quipped on July 7, 1894, that the papers should "boycott" strike coverage, because "these things cannot live without publicity."

[58]On Uncle Sam's origins and use, see Alton Ketchum, "The Search for Uncle Sam," *History Today* 40 (Apr. 1990): 20–26; Thomas H. Bivins, "The Body Politic: The Changing Shape of Uncle Sam," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (Spring 1987): 13–20.

[59]*Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 6, 8, 9, 1894; *New York World*, July 8, 1894. On the importance of manliness to the discourse of 1890s nationalism, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, 1995); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998). On the relationship between manliness and modern nationalism, see George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985).

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nounced that no person wearing a flag lapel pin would possibly be a rioter, because he or she "respects the American flag."[60]

Again, patriotic references could also take a pro-labor slant that countered the dominant narrative. Around the Fourth of July in that strike-torn summer, Debs's *Railway Times* rebuked the flag waving with its own defense of American liberty:

> 'Old Glory' is all right, temporarily in damned bad company but still in reach of reformation, and that the time may come when adherence to fact will not compel us to sing,
> 'And the star-spangled banner
> In triumph now waves
> O'er the land—eighty-three percent of it—of the
> usurer, plutocrat and thieving politician,
> And the home—$20 a month—of the slaves'[61]

Using the national anthem in this way might have appealed to many workers in dire straights, yet such a critique was very rare. The coincidence of America's national holiday and a national strike worked more successfully in favor of the dominant story-line of a country besieged.

The linking of the ARU's actions with insurrection proved so successful that a General Managers' Association representative could declare, "So far as the railroads are concerned with this fight, they are out of it. It has now become a fight between the United States Government and the American Railway Union, and we shall leave them to fight it out."[62] Another railroad executive wrote to a cabinet member that "the people" were now "thoroughly aroused. Their feeling is finding expression about as it did during the War of the Rebellion...the public without reference to party lines, are unanimous in approving and supporting the action of the President."[63]

After Debs refused to obey a federal court injunction to cease striking, he was arrested. Without a leader and in the face of mounting official and popular pressure, the strike fizzled. The antiunion *Chicago Tribune* now cast Debs as a defeated Lee, triumphantly declaring, "Debs Has Reached His Appomattox." The nation was again safe, the forces of American order having prevailed over an insurrection led by a dictator and carried out by the foreign mob.

[60]*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, *Wheeling Intelligencer*, and *St. Paul Globe* articles repr. in *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 15, 1894.

[61]"Fourth of July," *Railway Times*, July 2, 1894.

[62]Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, 144.

[63]Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America: A People's History of the Post-Reconstruction Era* (New York, 1984), 523–24.

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With the demise of the strike, the media was by and large quite jubilant. The ostensibly pro–working class *New York World* crowed that strikers had "realize[d] the folly of openly resisting the United States army," their "insurrection" having been "pretty surely crushed out."[64] The patriotic publicity campaign had worked, and the ARU would soon fade into insignificance. Casting Debs's crusade as essentially un-American through war language and accompanying patriotic imagery, the media effectively discredited his powerful union and all that he stood for.

The Price of Nationalism

The suppression of the Pullman Strike was a pivotal event in a decade full of upheaval. Demographically, a new wave of people who seemed different from older immigrant generations began to arrive en masse, coinciding (indeed fueled by) an emerging corporate order that was swallowing up older forms of face-to-face market transactions and replacing them with massive, impersonal factories and a mechanized transportation system that required an army of industrial workers. The Pullman Strike, involving as it did violence and the destruction of property, inspired an impressive backlash against foreignness and the vision of industrial unionism that seemed to depend on the new immigrants.

The narrative told by the largest and most influential[65] mass periodicals—the *New York Times*, *New York World*, *Chicago Tribune*, and mass-circulation magazines, as well as the numerous newspapers reprinting Associated Press pieces—revolved around the story of invasion, battle, and patriotic response. Although individual owners and publishers put particular ideological imprints on the story (typically pro-business, antiunion), the overall narrative tended to cohere around the plotline of the republic under siege. Keywords such as "anarchist," "mob," and "foreign" framed the event in no uncertain terms.

Also clear in the subset of periodicals examined for this essay is the fact that the narrative of Americanness versus foreignness could be interpreted in alternative ways. For example, the *Chicago Times*—praised by Debs as the only Chicago paper coming "flat out on the people's side"—criticized the

[64]*New York World*, July 12, 13, 1894.

[65]Ascribing influence to these periodicals is based on the centrality of text in the nineteenth century. This was a nation of readers, and newspapers provided a vital link to national affairs. Since the Civil War, newspaper readership had expanded greatly as illiteracy rates plummeted. In the last three decades of the century, circulation totals for daily publications had risen from 4,000 to over 12,000. During the strike, the press sold even more papers. The *Chicago Times*, for instance, gained 16,032 new readers in week one of the strike and would gain many more by strike's end. On the growth and influence of the press, see Michael Emery, Edwin Emery, and Nancy L. Roberts, *The Press in America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Boston, 2000), 157.

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presence of federal troops as "unwarrantable" and celebrated Governor Altgeld as exhibiting "true patriotism." For this paper, the railroads and not the unions were at fault. The ARU's paper accused Pullman himself of representing foreign values. Some California newspapers such as Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner,* having had long and contentious relationships with overbearing railroads, tended to be critical of the railroads as well. Such commentary provoked the *Nation* to remark, "The popular animosity to the railroads and the sympathy with the strikers that are manifested by almost all classes in California, as shown by the press dispatches, are perplexing to Eastern readers." The *Nation* excused such "lop-sided" and "weak" press coverage as evidence of deeper problems with the press in the West: "Journalism there means truckling to party and to the mob element."[66] In this period of uncertainty, it was not universally agreed that the strikers were at fault.

Despite the counter-narratives and the great masses of workers and sympathizers who were unhappy with the railroads, the mainstream press successfully cast the event as an attack on the republic. The consequences of this success can be measured by the largely unchallenged repressive federal response to the strike via court injunctions and federal troops, efforts validated by the largest media outlets. Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci argues that the state cannot be repressive without an ideologically friendly body of "printed matter" to sustain its decisions. "The printed word is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure" sustaining the dominant classes, he explains.[67] Newspapers reinforce elite interests by presenting and representing alarming pictures for general public consumption. As media scholar Kevin Ayotte points out, during the Pullman Strike the press could "legitimize the actions of the ruling class in violently repressing the strike by presenting the strikers as a foreign, hostile 'mob.'"[68] It is this federal repression of the ARU, and the media's role in mediating the popular reception of the strike and therefore sanctifying this repression, that points to the success of the nationalist frame. With the Pullman crisis, a challenge to industrial order had become apparent. The media's response suggests not a monolithic shutting down of industrial unionism but rather a fierce, successful struggle to define the parameters of the conflict in order to prevent an unwelcome alternative to corporate-led capitalism from taking root.

This success was not total. Indeed, not only would industrial unionism eventually return, but in the meantime a steady stream of anticorporate

[66]"The Situation in California," *Nation*, July 12, 1894, 23; "The Boycott," *Railway Times*, July 2, 1894; Lindsey, *Pullman Strike*, 193.

[67]Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman (London, 1995), 155.

[68]Ayotte, "Constructions of Violence," 220, 228.

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politicians and thinkers would contribute to a national debate over the extent to which business could dictate the terms of American growth. And the "immigrant question" and the "labor question" would remain touchstones of discussion and reformist activism in the Progressive Era.

What the mainstream media succeeded in doing during the summer of 1894 was to reinforce an exclusivist typology of the proper citizen that placed working-class activism in the camp of the Other—that is, un-American, alien, and hostile. Plugging the ARU into this formula served both to castigate industrial unionism and celebrate a pro-business, homogenous white America. Social theorist Tom Nairn argues that nationalism "supplies peoples and persons with an important commodity, 'identity.'" During the Pullman Strike, the mainstream media simultaneously defined this valuable commodity while also demonstrating that it was under threat. The result of this hotly stoked nationalism would be negative for organized labor generally and toxic for the country's industrial unions in particular. The *Railroad Trainmen's Journal* was hardly exaggerating when it noted, "The popular impression now is that organized labor is an element desiring to destroy all existing forms of society and law and seeking in the destruction of life and property that which will benefit the interests of the workingman."[69]

The selectivity of the bulk of the media's reporting (its framing of the event) illuminates not only the contingencies of nationalism—there were certainly unflattering representations of George Pullman and Attorney General Richard Olney, and "foreignness" was interpreted to mean a number of things—but also its elemental power. In the event of a perceived threat, nationalism provides a secure source of identity and collective assurance. Guided by powerful patriotic imagery—flags, Uncle Sam, stolid soldiers—the media fed the public a mythical, unifying vision of a nation holding the line against foreign foes. "To those that swallow the nationalist myth, life is transformed," journalist Chris Hedges ruefully suggests. "The collective glorification permits people to abandon their usual preoccupation with the petty concerns of daily life."[70] In this instance, an organized, hostile enemy of the state proved a singular presence against which to channel popular fears of a country slipping from its moorings. That such an analysis hardly captured the far more complicated reality of rising corporate dominance and an imperiled industrial labor movement was beside the point. This was a moment of us against them, a defense of the state requiring immediate, drastic response. Associating the strike with the Civil War solid-

[69]Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain* (New York 1981), 321. "A Common Fault," *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, Oct. 1894, 877.

[70]Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York, 2003), 54.

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ified the nationalist response. As *Harper's Weekly* reported in the thick of the strike, "The nation is fighting for its own existence just as truly as in suppressing the great rebellion."[71]

The cultivation of nationalistic zeal during the Pullman Strike is all the more interesting because George Pullman did not make an attractive victim. Elements of the popular press had long criticized his efforts at creating a harmonious idyll outside of Chicago. The *Chicago Herald* deplored his utopia as early as 1883, and other periodicals had published accounts of the stifling, controlling atmosphere in the town throughout the 1880s. *Harper's Monthly* ran a piece a decade earlier by economist Richard T. Ely, who noted that the town was in a state of "benevolent, well-wishing feudalism." The *Nation* agreed, explaining that Pullman town was in fact "alien from the republic in which it exists." The *Chicago Times* went so far as to say, "Pullman is the most un-American town in America. It belongs to the map of Europe. It is a civilized relic of European serfdom." In terms of core values such as liberty and freedom, Pullman as an all-American industrial haven proved a weak case indeed.[72] Yet this view scarcely factored into how the strike was framed.

The media rarely presented George Pullman as the victim during the strike. If they had, the public surely would have been less persuaded by the antiunion angle of press coverage. The victim here was the public itself, a body represented by the state and depicted as under attack from external forces. The counter-use of a nationalist narrative during the strike by workers and sympathetic journalists could not turn the press-influenced tide of public opinion, conditioned as it was by decades of similar coverage of labor upheaval. As the strike wound down, *Harper's Weekly* railed at laborers who "tortured the language" by criticizing strikebreakers as "scabs" and "blacklegs" and who, in a "grotesque inversion of the definitions which right and wrong have always borne," convinced unionists to attack the representatives of order and economic growth.[73] Making an assault on Pullman's corporate order an "inversion" of moral certitude was perhaps the definitive endorsement of the pro-corporate, anti-immigrant version of national character underpinning much of the press's coverage.

Just a few years later, the struggle for national self-definition would give birth to new ways of incorporating the new immigrants into the nationalist narrative, with notions such as the "melting pot" and the transformative process of Americanization.[74] These concepts would emerge as the white middle class recognized the permanence of these new groups and, drawing

[71]"The Boycott of the Pullman Company," *Harper's Weekly*, July 7, 1894, 627.

[72]Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 205, 208. Richard T. Ely, "Pullman: A Social Study," *Harper's Monthly*, Feb. 1885: 452–66; *Chicago Times*, June 16, 1894.

[73]"Monopoly," *Harper's Weekly*, July 21, 1894, 675.

[74]Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Victoria Lamont, "Crossing Borders: Interdisciplinarity,

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on reformist traditions, redefined citizenship and nationalist ideology to match the changing times. But in 1894, such beliefs had yet to capture the popular imagination. Rather, fear of the Other motivated a nationalist response. Remington's soldier at the switch guarded more than just a railroad track. He defended a particular, exclusionary civic ideal against threats of anarchism and unwelcome immigrants.

Immigration and the Melting Pot in the American Cultural Imaginary," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27:2 (1997): 23–43.

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