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Working-Class Muscle: Homestead and Bodily Disorder in the Gilded Age

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“They are having a very searious [sic] riot at Homestead. There is a great many killed and wounded on both sides and it will continue until the state troops put it down.” In his diary entry from the evening of July 6, 1892, Robert Cornell recorded the news of violence that had occurred earlier that day in Homestead, a mill town six miles upriver from Pittsburgh and home to the Carnegie Steel Company’s massive works. Even without the avalanche of details that would emerge throughout 1892 and 1893 in the regional and national press, Pittsburghers like Cornell placed immediate emphasis on the events at Homestead. The former coal worker offered two ways to capture the day’s meaning—as a breakdown of civic order and as a tally of the damage done to bodies. By describing the clash between steelworkers and employees of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency as a riot that would cease only when National Guard troops enforced order, Cornell assumed that workers had broken free of the constraints that normally held them in check. Industrial discipline, craft pride, and regular wages no longer channeled the power of Homestead’s 3,800 workers into the production of steel. Instead, workers now exhibited that power on the streets through acts of violent unity. Furthermore, in noting the physical toll of the day’s fighting, Cornell situated July 6, 1892 as a day of battling bodies that could be understood in terms of injury and death. Combined, Cornell’s pair of explanations represented a striking interpretation of the meaning of Homestead, one that was echoed throughout the nation in the establishment press.¹

The Homestead steel lockout claims a powerful place in the history of American labor. Historians have viewed the lockout as a contest over definitions of rights and responsibilities, a stunning setback for a dominant labor union, and a triumph of employers over workers in the Gilded Age. Paul Krause has called the story of Homestead a “quasi-mythical epic” that became entrenched in American folklore through images of riot and bloodshed. Placing the lockout at Cornell’s intersection of chaos and physiques emphasizes two themes that are central to the historiography of late nineteenth-century industrial labor: immigration and industrial masculinity.²

¹Robert Cornell diary, 6 July 1892, MSS 159, Box 2, Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, PA (hereafter, HSWP).

²For historical analysis of the Homestead strike, see Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh, 1992); David P. Demarest, ed., *“The River Ran Red”*: *Homestead 1892* (Pittsburgh, 1992); Leon Wolff, *Lockout, the Story of the Homestead*

First, studies of turn-of-the-century immigration to American industrial cities have stressed the mix of nativism and Progressive science that shaped a perception of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe as an invading horde. Dale Knobel and Matthew Frye Jacobson have examined nativist writers' and lawmakers' equation of immigrants' appearance with their supposed inability to function in the American political and economic system. Such physiognomic scrutiny worked to classify both individual subjects encountered directly in daily life and masses of immigrants glimpsed in newspaper articles, magazine editorials, and census reports. Jacobson, especially, saw "moments of violence and civic unrest" such as riots and lynchings as a key opportunity for nativist marginalization of immigrants. Civic crises allowed journalists and politicians to establish a correlation between ethnic diversity and disorder. Moreover, historians of science and public health in the late nineteenth century have found a similar sense of alarm about alien physical attributes in the discourses of municipal engineers and municipal health departments. Studies of the ways in which city officials labeled immigrants as health threats have shown that medical and social sciences offered an authoritative means for explaining the immigrant as a social burden. Ultimately, immigration historians have provided vivid case studies of Americans' ability to translate the visual cues of ethnic identity into signs of bodily danger.³

Secondly, historians' attention to the versions of masculinity adopted by (or attributed to) late-nineteenth-century workers has revealed the visual and rhetorical cues that made gender just as prominent as ethnicity in working-class identity. Tension between the models of "rough" and "respectable" manhood emerging from Gilded Age factories and mines paralleled middle-class men's fears of emasculation at the hands of muscular, belligerent, unskilled workers and admiration for physically capable, upstanding, skilled workers. The boundaries between the two archetypes were porous. Indeed, as Mary Blewett showed in her study of Massachusetts textile workers, a prevailing version of industrial manhood stressed "skill and physical strength, along with respectability and law-abiding sobriety." These attributes, combined with what another historian has termed a "manly

Strike of 1892: A Study of Violence, Unionism and the Carnegie Steel Empire (New York, 1965); and J. Bernard Hogg, "The Homestead Strike" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1943).

³Dale T. Knobel, "America for the Americans": *The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York, 1996), 219-34; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigration and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 39-68; Alan M. Kraut, "Plagues and Prejudice: Nativism's Construction of Disease in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century New York City," in *Hives of Sickness: Public Health and Epidemics in New York City*, ed., David Rosner (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), 69; Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore, 2003). See also John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health* (Urbana, 1990), 178-83; and Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York, 1994).

stance” against employers, formed an environment in which aggressive labor strikes seemingly balanced roughness and respectability. Thus, for a middle-class audience, both standards of masculinity were troubling because they emphasized economic and political conflicts manifested in decidedly physical ways. The close connection between a “sturdy,” bodily definition of manliness and workers’ claims to an increased share of industrial profits emerged most prominently during work stoppages. When Allan Pinkerton compared the strength of the detective agency he founded to that of the nation’s industrial workforce, he noted that mill workers and miners employed a “concentration of brute force” to achieve their strike goals. Pinkerton’s observation depended on a linking of manliness rooted in physicality and social disruption, an association that scholars have found echoed throughout the press of the late nineteenth century. Anxiety over gender styles, like fears about the effects of immigration, resulted from an effort to read workers’ bodies for signs of menacing difference.⁴

By viewing the “Battle of Homestead” through contemporary written accounts that emphasized workers’ bodies in modes of spectacle, horror, and suffering, we focus not on the event itself, but observers’ attempts to use the event to explain such industrial byproducts as demographic change and the division of labor. Although the violence at Homestead erupted quickly and unexpectedly, it did not occur without spectators. A plethora of journalists descended on the mill town in the weeks before the fighting to report on the war of words between the union and the company. The result was a publishing frenzy that sold the story of labor strife to the city and the nation. Arthur Burgoyne’s *Homestead* and Myron Stowell’s “*Fort Frick*,” both book-length accounts of the lockout published in 1893, presented themselves as eyewitness chronicles from local reporters who understood the essence of Pittsburgh industry. Burgoyne’s and Stowell’s accounts arrived relatively late, however. Joining the two writers in Homestead on that turbulent morning were dozens of reporters from Pittsburgh newspapers, journalists from major newspapers throughout the nation, Associated and

⁴Mary H. Blewett, “Masculinity and Mobility: The Dilemma of Lancashire Weavers and Spinners in Late-Nineteenth-Century Fall River, Massachusetts,” in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, eds., Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago, 1990): 165; Gregory L. Kaster, “Labour’s True Man: Organized Workingmen and the Language of Manliness in the USA, 1827-1877,” *Gender and History* 13 (April 2001): 25-27; E. Anthony Rotundo, “Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920,” *Journal of Social History* 16 (Summer 1983): 28-29; Allan Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and Detectives* (New York, 1878), x-xi. See also Joseph P. Cosco, *Imagining Italians: The Clash of Romance and Race in American Perceptions, 1880-1910* (Albany, 2003); Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 2002), 21-26, 34-64; Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women, and Modern Machines in America, 1870-1945* (Amsterdam, 1999); and Paul Michel Taillon, “‘What We Want is Good, Sober Men’: Masculinity, Respectability, and Temperance in the Railroad Brotherhoods, c. 1870-1910,” *Journal of Social History* 36 (Winter 2002): 319-38.

United Press correspondents, and a representative of the *London Times*. By mid-July, Homestead's *Local News* reported that at least 135 journalists from all corners of the globe had passed through the town to publish stories offering an immediate sense of what the fight had been like. The American establishment press, as opposed to publications by labor organizations, socialist groups, or other entities sympathetic to the workers' cause, narrated industrial growth and conflict to a primarily middle-class audience that was otherwise unfamiliar with the world of mechanized industry. Journalists aimed their vocabulary and rhetorical techniques toward the exotic, troubling elements of the Pittsburgh workforce.⁵

For professional observers—reporters, novelists, and social critics who narrated the violence—Homestead epitomized the startling physical struggle of industrial workers who challenged the governing laws of mechanized industry. Although it was not yet common in the early 1890s to read newspaper and magazine articles about the strains and dangers that workers faced each day on the job, written accounts of turbulent strikes in the United States appeared regularly. Before the turn of the century, workers' physiques came into public focus most clearly when mill operations were suspended by labor conflicts. Within their descriptions of battles between labor and capital, writers devoted considerable space to depicting the spectacle of working-class men amassed to argue their position against their employers. Workers' physical strength and bodily movements during disputes with their bosses became a symbolic shorthand that suggested the demographic shifts occurring in local industry. Journalists interpreted these physiques as a menacing index of work's degradation in the late nineteenth century. Press coverage of Homestead reveals the centrality of the body in attempts to explain the effects of mass immigration to the United States in the 1880s and 1890s.

The physical nature of the clash in Homestead meant that the bodies of the town's steelworkers became key items of interest for those attempting to make sense of the hostility. By emphasizing the display of thousands of workers engaged in common defense and describing in detail their physical sacrifices and feats of strength, contemporary Homestead narratives reveal a tension between several descriptive strategies used to capture the essence of the battle. The tension stemmed as much from perceived physical differences in the ranks of steelworkers (the pale, wiry, English-speaking worker and the dark, bulky worker from southern and eastern Europe) as from the skill and job divisions that separated them during the workday. Two sets of images emerged from Homestead accounts. First, reporters were struck by the spectacle of large groups of working-class people moving in and around Homestead. Attempts to describe the scene of the lockout focused repeatedly on the sight of a dark mass of workers as it took command of the

⁵Russell W. Gibbons, "Dateline Homestead," in Demarest, *The River Ran Red*, 158-59.

town. A great number of laborers' bodies moving together for a common purpose impressed and clearly threatened observers, who equated this physical type of social disorder with a breakdown of American industrial progress. Due to the large number of unskilled immigrants in the Homestead workforce, descriptions of gathered workers relied on terms that stressed the savage, animal nature of the group. Secondly, reporters waded through the mass to find scenes of individual strength, bravery, and suffering taking place during and after the battle. When observers turned their attention to individual actions, they produced a taxonomy of bodily types and abilities that divided the mass of workers further along lines of skill and ethnicity. For most observers who wrote about the events at Homestead, the individual and the mass represented different factions of the Pittsburgh working class—one that had elevated the city to industrial prominence and one that threatened to topple it. In the summer of 1892, workers' bodies appeared to be anything but the passive partners of mechanized production. Here was industrial labor embodied as an alien force, a physical and social threat to the industrial city. Here, too, was a striking illustration of the way in which labor was depicted for middle-class audiences in the late nineteenth century.

Walls and Fences

The bitter conflict in Homestead began over wages.⁶ In mid-June, the Carnegie Steel Company announced that the minimum wage paid to its "tonnage men" under the sliding scale system would be lowered from \$25 to \$22 per ton of steel billets produced. The tonnage men were members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (AAISW), unlike the rest of the Homestead workforce, which consisted of non-unionized mechanics and laborers who were paid by the day. Homestead's tonnage men were overwhelmingly native-born workers and members of old immigration groups that had established themselves in Pittsburgh by mid-century. When eight local AAISW lodges refused to accept the wage reduction, Carnegie Steel's chief of operations, Henry Frick, responded by ending the company's recognition of the union and locking workers out of the steel works on the banks of the Monongahela River. If workers wanted to reclaim their jobs, they had to do so under the company's terms and as individuals, not members of a labor organization.⁷

⁶Krause argues persuasively for the need to place the events of July 6 into a broader context of the labor movement in Pittsburgh during the 1870s and 1880s and a tradition of working-class republicanism. Although the direct cause of the lockout was the disputed wage reduction, this dispute can be seen as a product of the workers' belief in the republican values of independence and the common good, two concepts threatened by the company's decision to lower the minimum tonnage rate. See Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, 5-15.

⁷Much study of Homestead has focused on the 1892 death of steel industry unionism as a devastating moment for generations of townspeople. For narratives that suggest the short-

The week preceding the conflict on July 6 provided journalists with the first opportunity to present readers with stories focusing on the ways in which workmen in Homestead carried themselves. As locked-out workers gathered in meetings and waited for further action from their employers, journalists emphasized the order that seemed to hold skilled and unskilled workers together. This order was epitomized by the lack of physical menace on the streets—no workers committed violent acts, stumbled around drunkenly, or tried to intimidate others. As opposed to scenes they conveyed a week later, writers initially described a strict code of conduct in Homestead, where “men acted like trained soldiers” in following the orders of the AAISW Advisory Committee. The reportage began with images of stillness; local writers noted the absence of the usual noises of steel production in the town, replaced with “the thunder of an awful silence.” Workers’ bodies complemented this silence as they remained at rest and received only cursory press attention. Although work had ceased in Homestead, the discipline of the industrial workplace still held the workers in check. Skilled workers—the “deep-chested champions of organized labor”—reproduced their positions of authority within the steel mill and convinced the unskilled to heed their call for calm. The press duly noted the physical restraint of which Carnegie’s best workers were capable, reiterating the claims to respectable manhood that historians have identified in labor discourses in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Whereas unions used the mantle of respectable manhood as a strategy to give skilled workers the social respect as men that they were denied as workers, the press used the concept to explain the actions of men who led lives of physical conditioning and coordination. Unionized workers asserted their civic legitimacy by displaying both physical strength and the moral character to contain it.⁸

This emphasis on the order that the steelworker demanded of himself and his fellow workers echoed journalistic treatments of the steel works before the disputes of July 1892. Reporters stressed the clockwork rhythms of mechanized production as the system of work became more noteworthy than workers within the system. A *Pittsburgh Times* article by Harry Latton illustrated the local approach to explaining the daily operations at the mill. Surveying the mill in the spring of 1892, Latton marveled at the technological achievements and hard work that formed the “genius, skill, and experience” needed to make the best steel. Latton stressed the combination of processes, machines, and men that produced the “perfect system.” Al-

and long-term effects of the lockout, see, in addition to Krause’s aforementioned study, Hamlin Garland, “Homestead and Its Perilous Trades,” *McClure’s* III (June 1894): 2-20; Margaret Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (New York, 1910); Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace* (New York, 1941); and Judith Modell, *A Town Without Steel: Envisioning Homestead* (Pittsburgh, 1998).

⁸*The World* [New York], July 2, 1892; *The Local News* [Homestead], July 2, 1892, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 4, 1892.

though many actions took place simultaneously under the rooftops of the mill, there was never chaos on the work floor. Instead, management and labor had worked together with the "utmost care" to make every separate function contribute to the master plan. Employees, Latton noted, appeared content within a system that demanded instruction, coordination, and constant regulation. This idealized vision of life in Carnegie's mill presented workers as the willing partners in a management-machine-labor relationship; workmen accepted the necessity of their own compliance and accommodated their bodies to the larger system designed by the mill's architects. Reporters depicted the gathered workers in the week before the battle with the Pinkertons as an extension of this belief in order, now transplanted beyond the confines of the workplace. Although divisions were clear between the union and nonunion workers, they managed, at least initially, to control themselves as a single group.⁹

As rumors circulated throughout Homestead after July 1 about groups of outside workers or soldiers approaching the closed mill, journalists sought signs of increasing tension within the general scene of composure. Henry Frick called upon James McCleary, the Allegheny County sheriff, to provide a force of men to protect the mill's management from locked-out workers. A group of deputy sheriffs traveled by rail to Homestead on July 5 to issue a proclamation prohibiting assemblies outside the mill gates. Both Frick and McCleary were concerned about the ability of a large group of workers to control mill activities from the streets. Reporters amplified this apprehension, gradually presenting gathering workers not as a well-drilled group of soldiers accustomed to discipline, but as a crowd on the edge of physical disorder. Workers' bodies began attracting more journalistic scrutiny when they became disturbing; that is, when they became tools against the power of employers and the state.

When sheriff's deputies arrived at Homestead, they were met at the station by an estimated 2,000 workers. Here was the first true crowd scene reported in Homestead that summer, a "solid wall of surging humanity" that filled the streets of the town on July 5 and threatened the well-being of the sheriff's representatives. The *Pittsburgh Dispatch* described an unnamed AAISW leader urging calm to his fellow members in order to protect the deputies from the wanton power of the "unthinking mob." This distinction between the restraint of the union and the unruliness of nonunion workers continued throughout the weeks of reportage from Homestead. Although union workers themselves were at the center of the dispute, reporters focused on nonunion, mostly southern and eastern European workers as the driving force behind the violence of July 6. The majority of immigrant workers in Homestead were Slovaks who had come to town since the mill opened in 1881. In previous major disputes between workers and Car-

⁹Harry Latton, "Steel Wonders," *Pittsburgh Times*, June 1, 1892.

gie's company in 1882 and 1889, southern and eastern Europeans had joined with British, Irish, and native-born workers who embodied the bulk of the AAISW at Homestead. Both prior disputes had ended without violence, yet when the union official spoke on July 5 of the "unthinking mob" in the town, reporters interpreted this as a warning about the potential violence that might come from uncontrollable immigrant workers.¹⁰

Historians of American crowd behavior have demonstrated the central place of the crowd in the nation's political, racial, and economic conflicts. Most recent interpretations have been greatly influenced by the "rational crowd" theses of the 1960s and 1970s, first applied to gatherings in Europe. Scholars studying the history of mass action in the United States have categorized groups to determine, in William Pencak's word's, "how people who do not write 'traditional texts' are actually the 'authors' of riot and revelry." These works have responded to contemporary, critical accounts of crowds that stressed their chaotic and irrational nature. Militia leaders of the late nineteenth century distinguished between the characteristics of a crowd (a "spontaneous riotous assemblage") and a mob (a "premeditated and general uprising") yet explained the behaviors of both as a dangerous product of emotional instability. Historians' project in recent decades has been to resurrect the political and economic aims of street action, contextualizing mass disorder by positioning it along a continuum of public efforts to defend neighborhoods, ostracize individuals, or assert social equality. Less attention has been paid to the spectacle of the aggressive crowd and the ways in which this spectacle became the keystone of journalists' reports. In particular, pictorial newspapers and illustrated journals argued for the volatility of labor conflicts as measured by the strikers' appearance. Joshua Brown noted that "in physiognomy and costume," immigrants from Eastern Europe became a primary symbol of social instability in the pages of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. The visual techniques of presenting crowds became, like the words "riot" and "mob" themselves, "rhetorical bludgeons, handy for discrediting working-class organizations and justifying attacks on them."¹¹

¹⁰*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 6, 1892; Paul Krause, "East-Europeans in Homestead," in Demarest, *The River Ran Red*, 63-65; Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, 220. Although most historical studies of Homestead refer to the immigrant population as "Slavic," Krause correctly notes the lack of a single "Slavic" people and language.

¹¹*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 6, 1892; William Pencak, "Introduction," in *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, eds. William Pencak, Matthew Dennis, and Simon P. Newman (University Park, PA, 2002), 15; Albert Ordway, "Street Riots," in *The National Guard in Service* (Washington, 1891), 312, cited in Eugene E. Leach, "The Literature of Riot Duty: Managing Class Conflict in the Streets, 1877-1927," *Radical History Review* 56 (Spring 1993): 39; Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, 2002), 186; Leach, "The Literature of Riot Duty," 25. American studies that stress the political and economic underpinnings of crowd action include Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill, 1987) and *Rioting in America* (Bloomington, IN, 1996); Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Signifi-*



“One surging, congested mass of human beings.” From Arthur Burgoyne, *Homestead* (1893), 15.

The spectacle of July 5 revealed a mass of workers becoming a cordon for city officials. As the sheriff's deputies were escorted to union headquarters by AAISW officials, they moved slowly between two “walls of swaying humanity.” The words used in the *Dispatch* article to describe the meeting introduced readers to the spectacle of a working-class crowd that moved as a single body, with its own sense of coordination and its own pulse. The crowd surged and swayed, carried along not by rational thought but by the certainty of its own physical power. Workers formed human walls in the streets of Homestead, creating a new architecture with the collective use of their bodies. These *moving* walls, however, always threatened to engulf the deputies. Journalists impressed upon their readers the image of officers of the law sent to Homestead to secure access to the closed steel mill and forced to make their way between men who clearly had the physical power to determine who could travel where. Though this was only the first of several times that week that workers amassed to control the streets of the town, “walls” of workers on July 5 troubled observers as the first public exhibit of the laboring classes' united power.¹²

cance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War (New York, 1990); David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York, 1998); and David O. Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago, 1999). For examples of crowd studies from a European perspective, see George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (New York, 1964); Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France,” *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971): 41-75; and E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971): 76-136.

¹²*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 6, 1892.

The July 5 crowd provided journalists with a model of bodily power and menace that they used to a much greater degree in their narratives of the following day. In what Paul Krause has called a “fetishization of the physical violence” at Homestead, observers focused time and again on several key scenes used to encapsulate the day’s struggle. Journalists like a St. Louis writer who cautioned that “the story of this battle is hard to tell,” used these events to make sense of the often chaotic action that began in the early morning hours of July 6. The complexity of narrating Homestead stemmed from both contradictory sources of information available for reporters (workers, company officials, townspeople, Pinkerton guards, other reporters) and linguistic obstacles placed in their path. How could one describe a month-long struggle between a company and its workers that amounted to a lengthy stalemate punctuated by tumultuous episodes of bodily violence? What vocabulary offered a sufficient representation of the sight of a workforce arrayed against the efforts of its employer? Specific physical feats mitigated the narrative difficulty by focusing the tale of Homestead on its extraordinary plot of workers’ bodies used to exert workers’ will. Accounts of the day of fighting generally began with the town being woken by the cries and whistles of lookouts who had detected the approach of barges from Pittsburgh and quickly moved to breathless depictions of workers in action.¹³

Homestead residents were already on alert after a week of rumors about invasion, and the alarm of that morning only confirmed widely-held fears. Henry Frick was known in town as the man who had crushed immigrant workers’ strikes at his western Pennsylvania coke fields the decade before. A local minister, J. J. McIlyer, spoke of Frick as the man who was “less respected by the laboring people than any other employer in the country.” The call that came around 2:30 a.m. thus received a swift reply; townspeople left their homes quickly and moved toward the steel works. The *New York Herald* reporter could discern “no method, no leadership apparent” in workers’ quick reaction. There was not enough time to organize a response through the official channels of the AAISW, so workers moved against what they viewed as a potential attack. Myron Stowell described Homestead streets between three and four o’clock as “one surging, congested mass of human beings.” The mob of the previous day—powerful and threatening, but arrayed in distinct forms—had now lost its organization. Workers no longer formed avenues in the streets of the town, but instead filled those streets as they rushed to the steel works.¹⁴

¹³*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 6, 1892, excerpted in Demarest, “*The River Ran Red*”, 75; Krause, *The Battle for Homestead*, 14.

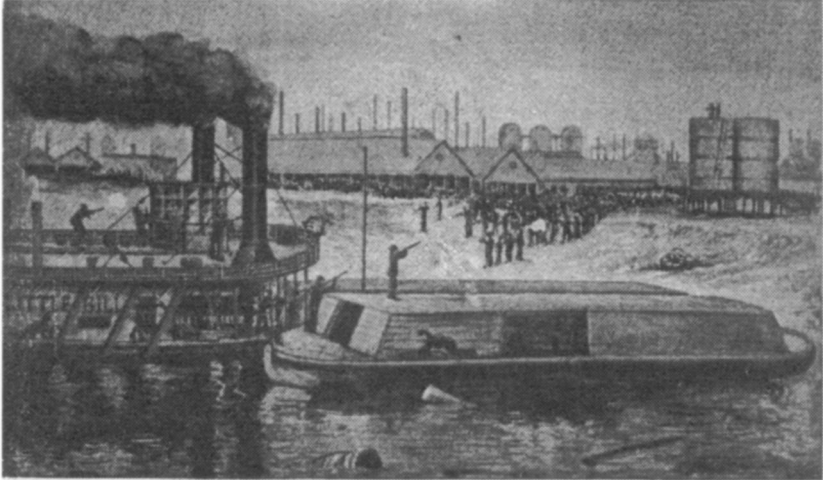
¹⁴J. J. McIlyer, quoted in Samuel A. Schreiner, *Henry Clay Frick: The Gospel of Greed* (New York, 1995), 87; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892; Myron Stowell, “*Fort Frick*”, or *the Siege of Homestead* (Pittsburgh, 1893), 40.

The first specific action that received news correspondents' rapt attention was the dismantling of a wooden fence surrounding the company's property. Frick had erected the eleven-foot structure in the last week of June as a stopgap measure to secure the works. One of Homestead's local papers promptly christened the mill "Fort Frick" and warned that workers loathed the fence because it blocked both their view of and access to the mill. Knights of Labor leader Terence Powderly later defined the fence as a direct threat to the livelihood of Homestead workingmen, an attempt to keep them from their rightful place as wage-earners and steelmakers. When it became clear that barges moving up the Monongahela would land at the mill, workers destroyed the fence to gain access. Arthur Burgoyne described a mass of "strong men" who tore the fence down "with a roar of anger" and pushed it aside on their way to the riverbank. The *New York Times* reporter noted how the heavy fence of planks and barbed wire "fell like a paper wall" under the workmen's power. Another New York paper questioned the decision to erect the fence in the first place, arguing that it stood as nothing but a physical challenge to men who responded vehemently to tasks that required muscle. Who could have truly believed, asked the writer, that such a fence could "keep out the mob when its blood was up?"¹⁵

The fall of the perimeter fence represented the first time that week that workers' bodies actually made violent contact with Carnegie's property. This fact was not lost on observers who chronicled the approaching confrontation. Until this point, the display of workers' physical power had been purely spectacle. The sight of thousands of bodies grouped together had frightened Frick, muted sheriff's deputies, and awed correspondents. The working-class mass had transformed the town of Homestead through its visual potential, its suggestion of what industrial workers' bodies *could* do. When the fence fell under the exertions of Burgoyne's "strong men," however, the potential of the mass had translated into real power. If there was no question in the mind of the *New York Herald* writer that the fence would fall, it was because the spectacle of steelworkers' bodies had been so unnerving the day before. After all, how could a fence of wood hope to stop men who wrestled with steel six days a week?

If the trampled security fence was the first overt physical act of the lock-out, reporters also interpreted it as the last blow to workers' self-restraint. As they moved past the fence, workers appeared to journalists as if they had broken free of the bounds of civilization itself. The St. Louis reporter watched as "on the maddened mass rushed." The men began "swarming around cupolas" as they entered the massive yard of the works, "wild with

¹⁵"The Homestead Strike," *North American Review* 155 (September 1892): 374; Arthur Burgoyne, *Homestead: A Complete History of the Struggle of July, 1892, between the Carnegie Steel Company, Limited, and the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers* (Pittsburgh, 1893), 56; *New York Times*, July 7, 1892; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892.



A “dark, angry mass of men.” From Arthur Burgoyne, *Homestead* (1893), 64.

warlike delight over their easy victory.” This emphasis on wildness, along with the reference to the workers’ blood being “up” as they demolished the fence, correlated closely to a theory of the biological process of labor strikes popular among American social critics in the 1890s. After two decades of strike activity in the United States, writers who addressed the “labor problem” began describing patterns in the evolution of strikes. In an article titled “The Methods of the Rioting Striker as Evidence of Degeneration,” James Weir summarized late nineteenth-century efforts to detect signs of savagery in labor conflicts. Weir investigated striking workers’ “strange desire to revert to the customs, habits, and beliefs of our barbarous progenitors.” Elsewhere, popular historians illustrated their accounts of labor conflicts in the Gilded Age with photographs of strikers presented in the style of police mug shots. The rhetorical device of such “striking specimens” attempted to link workers’ physical appearance with their supposed moral or cultural deficiencies. The savage practices that Weir emphasized amounted to the liberal use of workers’ size and strength to injure and intimidate their opponents. In this model of workers’ action, the striking group was composed mostly of immigrants and sons of immigrants, men who differed in startling fashion from “normal man,” whom Weir implied was either native-born or an English-speaking European immigrant. The savage element was even more dangerous because of its power over its civilized Anglo-Saxon brethren—as Weir noted, “the fear of bodily harm or the fear of being considered a coward have made many a law-abiding man a criminal.”¹⁶

¹⁶*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 6, 1892, excerpted in Demarest, “*The River Ran Red*,” 75; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892; James Weir, Jr., “The Methods of the Rioting Striker as Evidence of Degeneration,” *Century* 48 (October 1894): 952-54; Gregory M. Pfitzer, *Picturing the American Past: Illustrated Histories and the American Imagination, 1840-1900* (Washington, D.C., 2002), 227-28. Weir, a doctor from Owensboro, Kentucky, concluded that bad nutrition, intemper-

When a reporter for *The World* followed workers as they “ran like wild men” over the downed fence and into the yard, he participated in the larger narrative tradition of chronicling the descent into savagery that accompanied violent clashes between workers and their employers. One reporter went as far as comparing the noise of the building crowd to the “charging cry of the black fanatics of the Sudanese desert.” In the pages of the national press writers transformed Homestead steelworkers into objects of both fear and wonder, human beings who threatened to become something less than human while also displaying extreme physical ability. Work in mechanized industry had produced hardened bodies, but the strength that lay within them was not governed by “normal” intellect. Reporters in Homestead defined what was normal for American workers by presenting the boundaries of normalcy as they were toppled along with the fence. In that sense, a model of the civilized citizen-worker of the Pittsburgh region came into being only when workers committed an act that could be fit easily into the pattern of savage, degenerate labor troubles.¹⁷

Dark Masses and White Bodies

As the steel yard filled with over 3,000 workers and townspeople, reporters in Homestead set the scene for the confrontation of two distinct forces. The first was as yet unseen, moving silently upriver under the cover of darkness. The second was omnipresent, in constant motion as it occupied the steel works. The tension of the scene was heightened by the darkness of early morning, as the barges landed at the mill around 4:30 a.m. At this point, Burgoyne switched his mode of presentation and attempted to place his readers inside the Pinkerton barges, looking out onto a riverbank full of men and women, “some of them half-dressed...some with stones or clubs in their hands.” The scene before them, noted Burgoyne, “was one to appall the bravest.” According to the *New York Herald*, the riverbank at the steel works was filled with a “dark, angry mass of men.”¹⁸

The darkness of the mass signified more than the hour of the morning. Burgoyne’s technique of bringing the reader into the mind of a Pinkerton guard as he approached a howling crowd carrying primitive weapons simulated late-nineteenth-century travel narratives that recorded explorers’ first contact with the indigenous people of exotic locales. In the narrative of savage regression that characterized the reportage of the morning hours of July 6, it made sense to observers like Burgoyne to imagine themselves not

ance, and “sexual perversion” were three sure signs of a potentially savage workforce.

¹⁷*The World* [New York], July 7, 1892; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892.

¹⁸Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 58; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892. On the effectiveness of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, see Frank Morn, *The Eye that Never Sleeps: A History of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency* (Bloomington, 1982); and Robert Michael Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the United States* (Athens, OH, 2003), 4-21.

in the streets of Homestead, but advancing toward those streets, as if exploring the Monongahela River for the first time. This technique made the Pinkertons' discovery of the Homestead workforce a surrogate for reporters' discovery of the day's physical spectacle. Although reporters encountered the workers before the arriving Pinkertons, they replayed the scene of first contact to stress the terror that emerged before them. The popularity of tales of exotic adventure depended on several popular concerns at the turn of the century. Social critics seized upon theories of Darwinism and recapitulation to reinforce claims to Anglo-American advancement. Under recapitulation theory, the growth of individuals and the growth of racial and ethnic groups were conflated to such an extent that they mirrored each other. If cultures, like species, evolved over time into more sophisticated forms, then those who lived in an advanced culture and rejected it—immigrants who were slow to respond to Americanization—offered a glimpse of biological primitivism that demanded the public's attention. The voyage to alien shores became a form of scientific inquiry as well as travel. The influx of immigrants to the United States in the 1880s challenged the assumption that vast ethnic and cultural difference could be found only in distant lands. Indeed, much of turn-of-the-century anthropology in the United States considered the exotic as it existed at home, in the form of Appalachian hillbillies, natives of the American West, and the foreign-born of mill towns. Moreover, the dramatic climax in exotic adventure tales was the first glimpse of the tribe, when all questions were still unanswered and all responses, friendly or otherwise, were still possible. Burgoyne's sympathy for Pinkerton guards at this point in the narrative was more than an idle device to depict workers. Burgoyne dared readers to assume the viewpoint of men who were about to face this crowd of steelworkers. The glut of description that preceded this scene established tension and compelled the reader to expect the worst from Homestead's labor force. Given the fact that workers had made quick work of the fence, what would the reader do if faced by this mob?¹⁹

¹⁹On the science of savagery, see Steven Jay Gould, "Measuring Bodies: Two Case Studies on the Apishness of Undesirables," chap. in *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1981), 113-45. On the popularity of wildness in the United States at the turn of the century, see Christopher A. Vaughan, "Ogling Igorots: The Politics and Commerce of Exhibiting Cultural Otherness, 1898-1913," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson. (New York, 1996), 219-20. Such a narrative strategy also suggested workers' inability to function as a responsible citizenry. Following Jacobson's positioning of turn-of-the-century racial discourse in the United States as a tension between the demands of capitalism and republicanism, we must note the deep political implications of the language of savagery. Reporters recast the initial appearance of Homestead workers on the morning of the battle in light of their actions later in the day. Behavior interpreted by the press as riot, defiance, and mob violence delegitimized workers' moral and political claims against their employer. The portrayal of Homesteaders as a threatening, primitive tribe effectively defined their capacity for self-government as that of the "heathen" or the cannibal. See Jacobson, 13-

As barges arrived at the riverbank, workers moved forward to meet them. William Foy, an English-born worker, walked to the head of the crowd to address the Pinkertons as they landed just below the mill. When a gangplank lowered from one of the barges, Foy stepped forward and stood at its end. The showdown at the gangplank appeared in most accounts of July 6, but the details of what occurred there differed slightly from version to version. The *New York Herald* reported that Foy bellowed to the Pinkertons, "Come on, and if you come you'll come over my carcass!" Stowell recalled Foy's declaration as, "Before you enter those mills you will trample over the dead bodies of 3,000 honest workingmen!" Burgoyne feared for Foy's safety, sensing that if the Pinkertons insisted on securing the steel works, "they would have done so over his body." Reports presented Foy's body or multiple workers' bodies, dead or alive, as the chief obstacle to the disembarking Pinkertons. Workers had used their bodies to destroy the fence; they would use them now to defend their mill.²⁰

The significance of Foy's "piece of bravado" at the gangplank lies in its individual agency. His solitary action was the first that writers mentioned, the first they isolated from the chaotic movements of the mob. Foy, a middle-aged man who reportedly wished to "grapple with the powers of darkness in bodily form," was the first worker to stand out amid a crowd that reporters depicted as dark and bloodthirsty. Foy illustrated the precarious position that writers created for the Anglo-American worker in Pittsburgh industry. He was determined to fight the darkness present in Homestead, but whether the darkness was in the form of Pinkerton guards or immigrant masses was left up to the reader to decide. Writers stressed the physical difference between Foy and the mass of unskilled workers, but they also suggested the transcendence of such difference. Foy stood for the rest of the crowd, leading it in defense of the steel works; he also stood apart from the crowd, acting as a bright focal point distinct from the mass that was too dark to scrutinize thoroughly. Whether the Pinkertons had to trample over his body alone or the bodies of all 3,000 "honest workingmen," the laborers' anger was expressed coherently through the initial sacrifice of a white body. Foy was the first to be hit by a bullet that morning as gunfire volleyed between the two sides, seconds after he offered his somatic challenge to the arriving Pinkertons.²¹

14, 73, 166-68. For comparison to news reports on the massive 1877 railroad strike in Pittsburgh, see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York, 1985), 480-89. A key difference between the two events, as Slotkin notes, is that the local workforce of 1877 was "predominantly white and largely American-born."

²⁰*New York Herald*, July 7, 1892; Stowell, "Fort Frick", 46; Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 60.

²¹U.S. Congress, House, *Investigation of the Employment of Pinkerton Detectives in Connection with the Labor Troubles at Homestead, Pennsylvania* (Washington, D.C., 1893), 52; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892.

Once the hail of bullets had begun, Stowell quoted a worker as saying, "There are but two weeks between civilization and barbarism, and I believe it will take only two days of this work to make the change." To reporters, the transformation had already been made. The actual armed battle at Homestead lasted throughout the morning and afternoon, ending with the Pinkertons' full surrender after four o'clock. For over ten hours, workers and guards fired intermittently at each other, while workers sought cover behind piles of metal in the mill yard and guards barricaded themselves in their barges. The press at Homestead presented the events leading up to this battle as clear moments in which workers wielded their bodies as weapons against the invasion of an external police force. In the press narrative, though, the armed struggle that followed was a step removed from the level of flesh and blood. The battle was chaotic and confusing for journalists, who sought cover from the gunfire at varying distances from the mill yard. Only when workers suffered gruesome injuries or took actions beyond the monotony of firing bullets did their bodies come back into focus.²²

The chaos of the day's fight meant that observers strove to focus on fragments of the action instead of the entire dizzying scene. At one point in the morning, Stowell's focal point became the "tall, brawny workman" who led his comrades in throwing sticks of dynamite toward the barges after it was clear that simply shooting at Pinkertons would not lead to a definite conclusion. This "Herculean workman" was one of many who heaved explosives rhythmically "until every muscle showed like a whipcord" on their bodies. Stowell captured this snapshot of workers' muscles in action as the number of injured people on land and in the barges mounted. Before the direct physical contact between workers and guards that accompanied surrender, signs of violence on the riverbank were fleeting and haphazard. Workers fell suddenly, struck in their knees, shoulders, and chests by unseen bullets. Injuries from bullets occurred so quickly that the press only observed their results, as men fell and clutched their wounded bodies. Smoke from discharged weapons and fires obscured the scene on the riverbank from many reporters, making the suffering of injured workers a highly personal experience.²³

Of those who died during the battle, Silas Wain's death attracted the most attention from correspondents. While workers devised methods to assault the barges, several men on the north bank of the Monongahela River, opposite the steel works, produced a cannon that belonged to a local post of the Grand Army of the Republic. Their intention was to demolish Pinkerton barges one shot at a time, but they missed their mark. A shell struck Wain, a young worker standing in the yard of the steel works. Wain's injuries were massive; as *The World* reported, "his flesh was horribly lacer-

²²Stowell, "Fort Frick", 51.

²³Ibid., 52.

ated and he presented an awful appearance as he lay bleeding on the ground.” According to the *New York Herald*, his body was reduced to a “mangled mass of bloody flesh.” That Wain was struck with a shell fired by his fellow townspeople was less important to the press than the fact that his ruined body illustrated the ultimate vulnerability of the strong working-class physique. The bodies of Foy and the other workers who had been shot showed little of the gore caused by artillery. Instead, they displayed the impact of the fight through other means—writhing in the dirt, falling from perches, suddenly lying still. Wain’s dying body, on the other hand, was not “eloquent with the effects of battle.” Instead, it brought the correspondents’ reports to an abrupt halt, as if signaling a moment that defied simple description. A decade later, Pittsburgh Survey researchers highlighted the appearance of damaged and spent working bodies, yet such a technique did not prevail in the early 1890s. Damaged working bodies were not yet a regular feature of Steel City narratives; descriptions of Wain’s body, turned inside out, stressed the extraordinary nature of a spectacle that was only tenuously connected to industry but remained a testament to the extremes of bodily violence.²⁴

Those who were less injured than Wain sought cover from the Pinkertons’ view. Stowell described injured workers “dragging their bodies like snakes along the ground” to find safe places to wait for aid. In a yard littered with stacks of scrap and pig iron, workers lay alongside the materials with which they normally worked. During the exchange of gunfire workers formed less of a threatening mass, scattering to all corners of the mill yard. Stowell’s description of the workers as slithering snakes suggests a marked diminution of their physical scale. Workers who had seemed larger than life in the early hours of the morning now attempted to make themselves as small as possible. A man who was shot a few feet from *The World’s* correspondent “was carried into the mill, his wounds roughly dressed, and loving hands bore him to his home.” Injuries turned men into feeble shadows of the Herculean figures who could overpower city officials. The exposed weaknesses and ultimate mortality of Homestead workers emerged most in the media coverage of these middle hours. Before and after the gun battle, reporters glimpsed few signs of frailty in the town’s steelworkers.²⁵

The dozens of injured workers were only a small portion of the “two thousand maddened men” who fought Pinkertons on July 6. Though scattered by gunfire, the uninjured workers’ unity at this point seemed unbreakable to the press. The reporter for the *New York Herald* surveyed the crowd, from the “smooth faced boys” to the “huge mustached old steel workers,”

²⁴*The World*, July 7, 1892; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892. The phrase “eloquent with the effects of battle” is Alan Trachtenberg’s; see Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York, 1989), 116.

²⁵Stowell, “*Fort Frick*,” 52; *The World* [New York], July 7, 1892.

and found them all determined to crush the Pinkerton advance. When workers tried to destroy the Pinkertons' barges, whether with dynamite or flaming rafts, reporters presented them as moving with a single mind. With such a sense of purpose, it seemed as if the promise of destruction had provided workers with the organizational scheme that they had lacked earlier in the morning. To the *Harper's Weekly* reporter, the unity was apparent as the "mob took out a hand engine and...pumped oil into the river." Injury and death might have been isolating experiences for unlucky workers, but those who remained unscathed by the fighting were further joined together by the flurry of action and the insult of injury.²⁶

Reporters also chronicled the efforts of several union officials who counseled physical restraint during the hours of bloodshed. When white handkerchiefs began waving from barges in the afternoon, William Weihe, the President of the AAISW, used his influence among the workers to encourage them to accept a surrender. The *New York Times* reporter watched as "President Weihe loomed up, and heavy as his voice was, he was almost unable to be heard" above the crowd. As more union men attempted to restore some sense of order in the mill yard during the stalemate, Stowell reflected on the ambiguous nature of steelworkers who alternated between bloodlust and calm. These men "were not savages, but men of families who, perhaps a few hours before, had held infants on their knees or kissed their wives farewell. They were good, strong men, wrought up by the sight of blood." Stowell, for one, could not quite determine whether workers had descended completely to a state of unmanageable savagery. The experience of physical violence, with its threats to and demands on the body, had abridged the "two weeks" that separated civilization and barbarism, but did not turn the world upside down. Underlying Stowell's observation was the belief that the moment's savagery was caused directly by the horrors of battle and could be ended only by an equally spectacular conclusion. Peaceful surrender, it seemed, would not be enough.²⁷

When workers accepted the Pinkertons' surrender in the late afternoon, they forced the guards to exit their barges through the crowd of workers,

²⁶Stowell, "Fort Frick", 59; *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892; "The Homestead Riots," *Harper's Weekly* 36 (July 16, 1892): 678.

²⁷*New York Times*, July 7, 1892; Stowell, "Fort Frick", 55. When Weihe testified before a Senate Committee in 1883 on the state of immigrant labor in the Pittsburgh region, he referred to immigrant steelworkers as "the scuff, the bad specimens of the working classes." Weihe's experiences in Homestead in the late 1880s, the period in which immigrant workers supported the union's demands, had eased his disdain somewhat. When he testified about the Homestead lockout in November 1892, Weihe referred to the "certain class of foreigners...who very often have their own ideas of what has taken place in the country they have come from, and would perhaps feel like doing in this country things that are not particularly American." See U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report on Labor and Capital, Volume 2* (Washington, D.C., 1885), 7; and U.S. Congress, Senate, *Investigation of Labor Troubles* (Washington, D.C., 1893), 199.

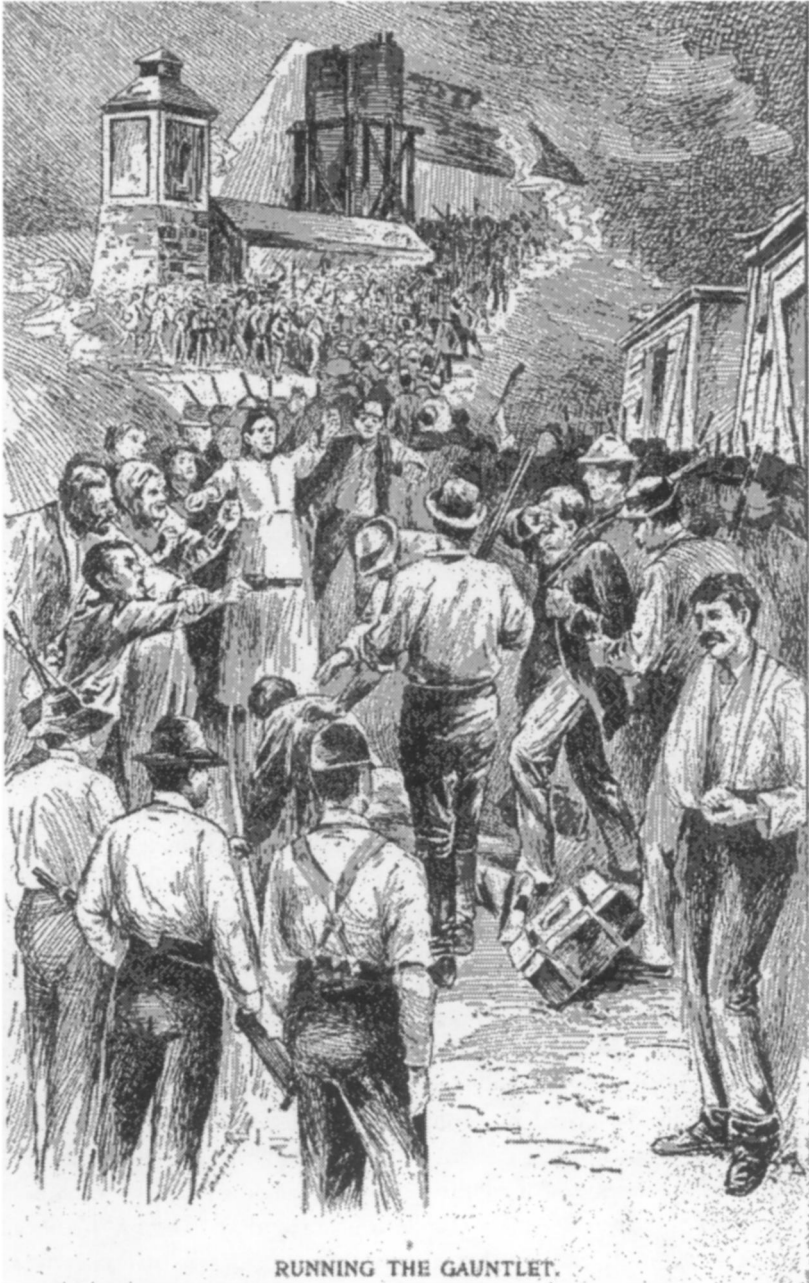
townspeople, and, according to Burgoyne, “thousands of outsiders—some of them millmen from South Pittsburgh, some roughs and toughs...some Anarchists.” The gauntlet scene as presented by reporters at Homestead was the full culmination of the mob scene from the day before. Whereas the July 5 mob had simply wielded its collective power through a tangible sense of menace, the mob on July 6 struck out at surrendered Pinkertons with fists and clubs. The creation of the gauntlet was the first instance in many hours in which steelworkers and others in the yard had organized themselves again as a mass of bodies in order to control their enemy. As Krause notes, the sight of bloodied Pinkertons stumbling through the gauntlet became the most widely-used image to symbolize Homestead workers’ temporary victory. The scene also became shorthand for working-class savagery; the House Committee that investigated the Homestead affair concluded that the physical violence of the gauntlet was not only disgraceful to Homestead, “but to civilization as well.”²⁸

The World adopted Burgoyne’s device of placing the reader in Pinkerton shoes as they made their way from the besieged barges. After a day spent in smoky, cramped quarters, the guards entered a terrifying setting: “At the top of the bank, they found themselves in a narrow passageway between two huge piles of rusty pig-iron. When they emerged, it was to enter a lane formed by two long lines of infuriated men who did not act like human beings. They were frenzied by the long day of fighting and bloodshed.” Again, Homestead’s architecture came alive in the pages of newspapers and magazines as workers formed themselves into walls that served the same purpose as the pig iron surrounding them—to funnel Pinkertons into a narrow space of violent retribution. The press hinted that the impersonal violence that accompanied the day’s crossfire had not been enough to calm Homestead’s frenzy. Stowell’s “good, strong men” had not yet decided to go back to their wives and children. Reporters expressed their horror in recounting the scene as guards were “led like lambs to the slaughter” and fell to the “pack of wolves” awaiting them on the riverbank. In order to identify the enemy, workers forced Pinkertons to remove their hats. Guards’ bare heads, noted one journalist, “offered an easy mark to their half-crazed assailants.” The press focused on such details of violence to illustrate the combination of method and mayhem that correspondents experienced in the hour after the Pinkerton surrender. *Harper’s Weekly* described the gauntlet as “cruel and cowardly business” that epitomized workers’ approach to solving disputes with employers.²⁹

Tales of adventure in the American West had popularized the gauntlet in the late nineteenth century as a brutal Native American torture device. In

²⁸Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 82; U.S. Congress, House, *Investigation of the Employment of Pinkerton Detectives*, ix.

²⁹*The World* [New York], July 7, 1892; Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 84; “The Homestead Riots,” 678.



The "fierce carnival of revenge." From Myron Stowell, *Fort Frick* (1893), 62.

the biographies of Daniel Boone and other frontiersmen, native tribes used the gauntlet to weaken and demoralize a captive before his ultimate execution. In such a context, the gauntlet was a tool of the savage, a relic from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that retained a vivid sense of brutality in 1892. Just three years earlier, Theodore Roosevelt had pub-

lished his first two volumes of *The Winning of the West*, in which he detailed the experiences of captive Simon Kenton. Roosevelt's description of the gauntlet stressed its size and menace: "Next morning he was led out to run the gauntlet. A row of men, women, and boys, a quarter of a mile long, was formed, each with a tomahawk, switch, or club." Kenton suffered terribly as the Indians "beat him lustily with their ramrods, at the same time showering on him epithets." White traders eventually negotiated Kenton's release, but not before he was forced to run the gauntlet eight times. His "battered, wounded body" required weeks of healing. If men like Kenton and Boone were the "favorite heroes of frontier story" in the 1890s, it was because they had managed to face Indians' primitive ferocity and survived to tell about it. Historian Sherry Smith notes that the end of the nineteenth century was an ambiguous turning point for white America's understanding of American Indians. The 1890s witnessed new attempts to refute the stereotypes attached to Indians, but it was also a decade in which the image of the ignoble savage persisted in popular and scientific works. The tale of the gauntlet, along with tales of scalplings, deaths at the stake, and cannibalism reinforced easy, automatic images of savagery.³⁰

In this context, observers' focus on the gauntlet was both a convenient translation device for a readership assumed to be well-versed in adventure tales and a means of increasing the narrative's emotional stakes. Placing the Pinkertons on the path of such primitive cruelty, Burgoyne noted that "if the experience before them was not destined to be almost as trying as that attributed to the victims of the gauntlet torture in the tales of Indian life, it was not because the mob did not show all signs of thirsting for a fierce carnival of revenge." When a writer for the *Army and Navy Register* noted in 1892 that the defeat of the "red savage" meant that the chief domestic concern for the nation's military was now "white savages growing more numerous and dangerous," his argument rested on the same equation of strikers and Native Americans with which Burgoyne explained the "fierce carnival of revenge." According to a narrative tradition in which those who used the gauntlet on their captives were savages, the press fit townspeople easily into such sinister roles.³¹

The tension of the gauntlet did not subside once all of the guards had passed through it. As union leaders escorted guards from the mill and through the streets of Homestead, workers and others continued to harass their foes. A local paper chronicled the continuing violence as "this great restless throng arrived in front of the unpainted walls of the headquarters,

³⁰Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, Volume 2 (New York, 1889), 27-29; Sherry Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880-1940* (New York, 2000), 8-11.

³¹Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 83; *Army and Navy Register* editorial quoted in Jerry M. Cooper, *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport, CT, 1980), 254-55.

then...halted and spread out until the neighboring streets and lanes were filled to overflowing." At this stage, the press suggested, the center of the lockout returned once again to the streets surrounding the mill. Having successfully stopped the invasion, workers now refilled Homestead's avenues with their bodies and took over the town. As the Pinkertons finally reached the haven of the skating rink in which they were held, the physical action of the lockout ended. The town returned once more to a state of expectation and pondered the consequences of the day's battle.³²

Aftermaths of Homestead

The captured Pinkertons left Homestead by train that night, their departure bringing an end to the narrative, but not the narration, of July 6. Two weeks after the violence, the *Bulletin* reported that Pittsburghers were still talking about the drama of the gauntlet and the wider implications of worker violence. Reporters in town turned their attention to scenes of bitterness, vigilance, and mourning. The press juxtaposed the physical weakness of men killed or injured during the fight with the persistent power of their unscathed fellow workers. Although a number of men had suffered because of it, the battle of Homestead gave workers temporary control of the town. Neither the sheriff and his deputies nor Frick and his managers could disperse the crowd of workers. Until 8,000 troops of the National Guard arrived on July 12, workers occupied both the streets and journalists' attention.³³

As opposed to threatening mob images that had appeared in reports from July 5 and 6, journalists framed the gathering in Homestead after the battle as an embodiment of the union. The AAISW had lost its hold over unskilled workers on the day of the contest; during the gun battle and amid the violence of the gauntlet, union leaders had called for restraint, stressing that workers' goal should not be to injure Pinkertons, but to drive them from Homestead. The press presented the days after the fighting as the resumption of union control. The *New York Times* interpreted throngs of workers in the streets as "the Amalgamated men standing shoulder to shoulder" to keep non-union workers from stealing their jobs. The mass of workers' bodies in this sense had political and economic meanings that were absent a few days earlier. Now, workers huddled in mass to preserve their opportunity to make steel. Union leaders organized small groups of men—"the best representatives of brawn and muscle," according to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*—to maintain order in the streets of Homestead between July 7 and July 12. The press clarified that order was threatened by anyone whose motives differed from the union's—anarchists, the intemperate, but also non-union workers who might be unable to control their animosities. The

³²*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, July 6, 1892.

³³*Bulletin* [Pittsburgh], July 23, 1892.

AAISW now used its brawn to keep Homestead workers in line.³⁴

The notion of bodies subdued in the days following July 6 also emerged in the reportage of dead workers' funerals. In mourning their dead, workers appeared in a drastically different fashion than when engaged in violence. At the funeral for Joseph Sotak, a Hungarian steelworker who died from a gunshot wound in the knee, Stowell found the mass of mourners filled with "typical Hungarians—stoical, morose, and silent." The crowd was mostly steelworkers, with only "eight women among three hundred brawny men." Workers' brawn complicated the scene of reflection and sorrow, as memories of muscles in violent action clashed for Stowell with empathy for the mourners. Their brawn was muted, turned impotent before Sotak's body. On a subsequent day, funeral processions for John Morris, a native-born AAISW member, and Peter Faris, an unskilled Hungarian worker, met as they approached Homestead's cemetery. A reporter from *The World* watched as three hundred union men, marching four abreast, and five hundred nonunion men joined in "stern silence" to walk around the cemetery. The difference between a procession and a mob, noted the reporter, became clear through this "labor of love." The religious purpose of the procession gave it a legitimacy not displayed by the mob's strength-in-numbers.³⁵

The most lasting effects of the lockout were physical demands placed on workers and their families when they no longer collected wages. Burgoyne found men "almost worn-out with fatigue and hunger" on the day of the battle, a harbinger of what was to come. Burgoyne concluded that the strain of the day's fighting had been "enough to tax sorely the most robust physique." Fighting weakened workers' bodies, but poverty did as well. The ephemeral victory of July 6 came to an abrupt halt. As early as July 11, the *New York Times* reported that the people of Homestead were "hollow-eyed" from lack of sleep and "gaunt from the irregularity of their habits." The physical consequences of taking on Carnegie Steel were seen even more clearly several months later. With Christmas approaching, the *Pittsburg Press* turned its attention on December 9 to workers and families who had been refused rehiring at the steel works. The functioning mill, run by replacement workers since August and regular workers since mid-November, was a "lost paradise to the hungry men" standing outside the gates. To journalists who lingered in Homestead, the result of the lockout was the worker's body suppressed once more—in death, in hunger, or in the production of steel. Writer Hamlin Garland toured Homestead in the fall of 1893 and found a town on the verge of collapse. In the streets, "groups of pale, lean

³⁴*New York Times*, July 10, 1892; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 12, 1892, excerpted in Demarest, "The River Ran Red", 131.

³⁵Stowell, "Fort Frick", 96, *The World* [New York], July 8, 1892. The meeting of the funeral processions is also described in the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, July 8, 1892.

men slouched in faded garments" toward destinations unknown. Town residents struck Garland as "the discouraged and sullen type to be found everywhere labor passes into the brutalizing stage of severity." Workers in the mill appeared "lean, pale, and grimy," while those without work stumbled around outside. Garland's parting thought of Homestead was that "the town and its industries lay like a cancer on the breast of a human body." If the steel town was a cancer that marred the Pittsburgh region, then effects of the fight against capital still plagued workers' bodies as well.³⁶

One further wound from July 1892 afflicted neither a steelworker nor a Pinkerton employee. As a sensational event, the shooting and stabbing of Frick while he sat in his office on the afternoon of July 23 contrasted sharply with the reported chaos of the battle. The harrowing tale of the "wounded iron king" became front-page news throughout the nation. Alexander Berkman, the New York anarchist who would serve fourteen years in prison and eventually be deported in 1919, entered Frick's office shortly before two o'clock. Berkman intended to kill the man whom he viewed as a tyrant to the people (a belief shared by many in the Homestead workforce). After forcing his way into the office, Berkman shot Frick twice in the neck then stabbed him twice more while being wrestled to the ground. Frick emerged in the press as a pillar of physical strength and ideological resolve. The press coverage illustrates writers' effort to turn Frick's physical ordeal into a form of acquittal for industrial employers confronted by their workforce. The narrative of Berkman's assault and Frick's recovery featured none of the mass violence displayed on July 6, yet it brought into focus similar themes that shaped the coverage two weeks earlier.

Frick's ability to withstand such injuries, his manly courage in the days before the shooting, and his work ethic and business success in the previous decades conflated in immediate press accounts. Against the wishes of the twelve doctors gathered around his office sofa, Frick refused anesthesia during the two-hour probe for the bullets. The *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* concluded, "He showed great nerve, an indomitable will power and greeted the doctors pleasantly." The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* noted that "the wounded man was calm, had a perfect command of his faculties, and apparently was less excited than any other person in the room." The *New York Times* reporter described him talking "very freely" about the location of the bullets, signing letters, dictating further instructions for the operation of the steel works, and even drafting a sanitized description of the attack for his wife. Such was the contrast between reporters' portrayal of Henry Frick (who easily "forgot his own suffering" during waves of "intense agonies") and Adelaide Frick ("completely prostrated" and "overcome" by the incident) that the faithful wife ensconced in an East End mansion became Berkman's

³⁶Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 72; *New York Times*, July 11, 1892; *Pittsburg Press*, December 9, 1892; Garland, "Homestead and its Perilous Trades," 2-20.

surrogate victim. Her husband's "strong physical constitution" protected him from the violence of anarchism. Subsequently, the *Pittsburg Press* writer marveled at the "wonderfully calm appearance" on the victim's face as he was carried out of the building on a stretcher. The *New York Times* reporter stressed that Frick was "resting easily" on the evening of the attempt and "passed a comfortable night" in "cheerful spirits." The *Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph* likewise noted that he was "cheerful, bright and anxious to be about" only two days after the shooting. The Associated Press correspondent described Frick as "a robust man with a splendid constitution" and "extraordinary vitality," the ideal physical specimen to survive such an assault.³⁷

Furthermore, writers noted repeatedly that Frick had declined armed protection in the first three weeks of July, preferring to remain "at all times accessible to everyone." The image of a fearlessly genial Frick emerged in press accounts. Commentators explained that only a "man of undoubted strong physical courage," could have faced the danger of the situation without troubling himself with personal guards. According to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, he had always been "one of the most approachable men in the city." A correspondent for the United Press declared that Frick's bravery during and after the attack "bordered on the incredible." The *Pittsburg Press* stressed that he "had no fear of danger." Here was a man who adopted a "customarily polite manner of speaking to all callers" despite the obvious threats to his well-being. Frick's ability to stand firm in the weeks between the battle and the shooting became a back story in newspaper reports to help explain how the target of multiple gunshot and stabbing wounds could maintain his composure.

Finally, the press juxtaposed Berkman's and Frick's behavior in the hours before the shooting as exemplars of anarchism and capitalism. Berkman, "agitated" and pacing nervously, tried several abortive assaults on Frick that were scuttled when his "nerve failed him." Meanwhile, Frick sat consistently in his office, forever "busy," "engaged," and tending to the business of his company. The *Times* writer implied that Berkman viewed himself as a victim of industry, having unsuccessfully attempted to find work in New York. Another reporter explained that he had been "idle about the Anarchist haunts" of New York for some time because of his impertinence to former employers. Although quick to declare that Berkman had no relationship to the Homestead workforce, the *Times* drew a parallel between the anarchist's vision of assassination as a political tool and "the many threats...made against Mr. Frick by hot-headed workmen." That Berkman's actions were cold and calculated, as opposed to the supposedly instinctive,

³⁷The reportage in this and the following three paragraphs is taken from *Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph*, July 25, 1892; *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, July 25, 1892; *Pittsburg Press*, July 24, 1892; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 24, 1892; *New York Times*, July 24-25, 1892; and Associated Press and United Press reports printed in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 24, 1892.

bestial reactions of Homestead workers, marked him with an intellectualism that was translated into bookish cowardice and physical impotence. Reviewing the prison-cell search of Berkman's body, the *Times* remarked that he was "of slender frame and showed no evidence of having been engaged in a laborious occupation." Likewise, the Associated Press writer stressed his "sallow complexion" and concluded that he was "a thin and insignificant man."³⁸

The *Times* noted that the attempt had galvanized public opinion toward the company's side, as any "latent sympathy" for the strikers evaporated in the wake of the violence against Frick. The most startling manifestation of public sentiment came in the crowd that formed outside the company's office building during the afternoon and evening. The correspondent for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* watched as the crowd assembled, turning the street "black with people." The *Times* reported that a "throng of several thousand persons" assembled to see the drama unfold. In language similar to the coverage of July 6, the reporter described "surging throngs" that cried for Berkman's life as he was led out of the building by police. The crowd "completely filled the street from curb to curb." Later, when doctors tried to remove Frick to a hospital, the "assemblage...swelled like magic until at least 1,500 people, men and boys, with a fair sprinkling of women and girls, surrounded the building." The distinction between this throng and the throng of workers in the mill yard and streets of Homestead was clear, however. The *Times* stressed that the July 23 crowd was one of "curious spectators," people who would have been "shoppers and promenaders" had such excitement not occurred. The *Pittsburg Press* described the crowd as ordinary Pittsburghers "on the tiptoe of expectancy." The *Commercial Gazette* applauded the "law-abiding element" for its vehement denunciation of the attack, while the writer from Cleveland noted the restraint of the "better element." The Associated Press reporter suggested that the crowd of onlookers represented the city as a whole, with Berkman's deed condemned "by all sides and by all classes" within it.³⁹

³⁸The *New York Times* writer emphasized Berkman's extensive planning, despite that fact that he had only recently devised the assassination plot (his head "was turned by the reading of the Homestead troubles"). In addition to its remark about Berkman's physique, the *Times* noted that his "lips were thick, his nose large, and he was a typical Russian Jew in appearance." The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 24, 1892, noted that Berkman was "a Hebrew with a mean and sneaking look." The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 24, 1892, referred to him as "a dark complexioned young man with a Jewish cast of countenance." The *Pittsburg Press*, July 24, 1892, described the assailant as having "a peculiar appearance, but not that of a desperate man by any means."

³⁹The *Pittsburg Press* juxtaposed the sentiments of the crowd outside the Carnegie offices with those of a crowd of "idle mill men" in the city's Lawrenceville section: "The [workers'] remarks made in many instances are not worthy of repetition and unbecoming a citizen of this country."

Journalists' treatment of the attack on Frick suggests several links to their recounting of the battle at the steelworks. The fact that Frick survived the attack in such impressive fashion brought him to the foreground as the story's hero. Frick was both a familiar figure in the Steel City and an example of the familiar type trumpeted in the late nineteenth century as the ideal Pittsburgher—one who combined hardiness, bravery, and industry to triumph over others. Observers noted that his notorious tenacity in the business world complimented his physical resilience. To the same writers and editors, Berkman's body rendered him unsympathetic on two counts. His feeble frame marked him as a figurative stranger to a city that lauded the physical signs of hard work. Moreover, his dark, exotic features marked him as an example of the foreign threat that had so recently been displayed in the region. Berkman was an imperfect surrogate for Homestead's unskilled immigrants, of course. His physique was far too meager to represent a member of the steel workforce, and his much-reported cowardice did not correlate well with the workers described earlier in the month. Yet he was a similar force of disorder, and his unpredictability and proclivity for violence could be understood only partially through an assessment of his ideology. The rest of his biography was told through the odd spectacle of his body. Finally, the onlookers provided a striking counterexample of how the tendency toward group savagery could be avoided by the "right" types of people. Although they turned the city's thoroughfares dark with their sheer numbers, the Pittsburghers who gathered to witness the fate of Berkman and Frick did not subvert the law. The press stressed that the crowd was a vigorous voice of justice. Rather than position their readership against the crowd, then, reporters used the interested, unthreatening mass as a proxy for those who would presumably be disgusted by Berkman's actions. Writers encouraged readers to cheer Frick's recovery and condemn the man held in the city's jail. With the sides thus delineated, the narrative of the assassination attempt offered a means of assessing interpretations of the battle from a different angle. The relatively fixed descriptions concerning the assault told a more straightforward tale than the multiple, sometimes contradictory accounts from July 6.⁴⁰

Making sense of that initial flurry of representation is like counting bullets on the bank of the Monongahela—we may be able to determine the side from which they were fired, but must strain to discern their specific targets and larger meanings. The press narrated the events with an eye toward the physical stakes of labor's challenge to capital. Headlines alerting readers to a bloody battle or fallen victims introduced stories meant to explain in part how such spectacular violence could occur in an American industrial center

⁴⁰On the use of crowd imagery as a means of representing a mass readership, see Gregory Shaya, "The *Flâneur*, the *Badaud*, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," *American Historical Review* 109 (February 2004): 41-77.

(and what it looked like when it did). The Pittsburgh area was no stranger to working-class violence. Fifteen years earlier, during the railroad strikes of 1877, workers and their sympathizers had burned large sections of the city and freight cars of the Pennsylvania Railroad. A regiment of National Guard troops took over Pittsburgh in much the same way as their counterparts did in Homestead. The plot of 1892, however, surpassed that of 1877 in its dramatic simplicity—a single battle on a single battlefield with a distinct pair of combatants and an unmistakable story line. Although chaotic and confusing at times, the battle of Homestead allowed for a narrative focus that the earlier city-wide confrontation precluded. That focus fell on the contours, feats, and limits of the working body at war.

One legacy of the reportage of Homestead was the lasting image of two sets of industrial workers in Pittsburgh, one in control of its physical power, one running wild within a mob. Three years after the lockout, James Martin published a novel about the life and struggles of an industrial town titled *Which Way, Sirs, the Better?: A Story of Our Toilers*. Martin's story was inspired by events at Homestead and set in the fictional "Beldendale," a town in the "iron regions of Pennsylvania." Throughout the novel, conventions established in journalists' impressions and images of the summer of 1892 informed Martin's method of presenting the Beldendale workforce. His description of an assembled group of workers echoed the press coverage:

Some are respectably and cleanly dressed; others are in shirt sleeves, and without evidence of change of garments from the workshop; some are washed and shaven; others are as grim and sooted as when they left the mills and forges; some are grave, sober, and thoughtful; others are flushed, excited, and even boisterous; some bear evidence of no mean order of intelligence, scholarship, and refinement; others are brutish, ignorant, and uncouth.

Brutish, uncouth, flushed, and boisterous workers also out-bulked the washed and thoughtful ones. The *New York Times* offered a model of the "average striker" in Homestead as a "healthy, broad-shouldered, dark-skinned fellow...with clumsy hands and knotted joints, slender waist, and clear eye." This, the writer concluded, was "a magnificent specimen of manly development." Rules of averages and types at the turn of the century held that the ethnic specimen stood for the ethnic whole—the average striker was the mob of strikers, indistinguishable from the rest unless isolated as a specimen, as if on the slide of a microscope. The average striker was dark and manly, but the eight hundred Amalgamated workers who formed the leadership of the Homestead workforce were not average strikers. Hugh O'Donnell, chairman of the AAISW Advisory Committee and described as a leader of the Homestead defenders throughout the day of

fighting, appeared to Burgoyne as an unlikely model of leadership. O'Donnell's body, "rather slight of build" and pale, was less visually impressive than others in town. His slender but developed frame spoke eloquently of the decreasing physical demands required of a skilled worker—"one of the superior class of workmen"—in a mechanized steel mill. The work of a laborer, on the other hand, required long hours of constant exertion. What was hidden in the "magnificent specimen of manly development" was any sense of the drudgery and long hours that characterized the development process.⁴¹

The invisibility of work in Homestead in the summer of 1892 was a second significant effect of battle narratives. Rina Youngner notes that during strikes and lockouts, "workers were shown, not in their places by the machines but in the streets; they presented hostile and destructive faces to the middle class." For an industrial region that prided itself on production and the visible evidence of productivity, scores of articles describing workers' actions outside of the workplace was an anomaly. Instead of enthusiastic reports on the success of the Steel City, writers and illustrators across the country presented groups of men who were notable because they were not performing their usual duties. Journalists alternated their graphic depictions between faceless members of an unruly mass and individual models of the essential American workman removed from work. In the first approach, commentators pictured thousands of workers as a single, living entity characterized by violence and physical power. The "dark" crowd existed on an animal level, lusting for Pinkerton blood and barely controlling its instinct to destroy anything that opposed it. These were the "cultureless, alien beings" that dominated contemporary literature on labor strikes. Secondly, authors and reporters occasionally took readers further into this crowd to isolate individual figures who gave nuance to the ominous gathering. The individual Homestead worker described therein complicated the notion of an unthinking mass by appearing physically cultivated instead of raw and by using his body in heroic fashion to repel the hired invaders. Moreover, men who stood out to reporters were often skilled union men desperate to stop their fellow workers from taking violence too far. They represented the physical restraint that reporters saw in so few workers. In addition to the interplay between group and individual, when writers discussed workers as individuals, they divided them further into several physical types—the wiry Anglo-Saxon leader, the massive immigrant laborer, and the weakened victim. Each figure had its moment in the spotlight during the Homestead

⁴¹James M. Martin, *Which Way, Sirs, the Better?: A Story of our Toilers* (Boston, 1895), 17, 98; *New York Times*, July 9, 1892; Burgoyne, *Homestead*, 60. O'Donnell was a heater in the Homestead works' 119-inch plate mill, in charge of keeping slabs of steel at the correct temperature between various stages of rolling. On the use of "types" in images of striking workers, see Pfitzer, *Picturing the American Past*, 227-28.

drama, but the emphasis regularly placed on work in Pittsburgh was nowhere to be seen.⁴²

In the decades following the lockout, both apologists and critics of the Steel City made each of these representations a common archetype for thinking about the new world of work, skill, and ethnicity that emerged in the United States. With only slight modifications in context, the violent horde became the faceless industrial army, the heroic striker became the mythic Man of Steel, and the Joseph Sotaks and Silas Wains of July 6 became the industrial scrap-heap exposed in the first decade of the twentieth century. These local characters and groups were first used in vivid fashion in the narrative of the fight against the Pinkertons. The importance of physical display during the Homestead lockout was not simply a figment of reporters' imaginations. Indeed, workers themselves recognized the power of their spectacle. When National Guard troops arrived in town on July 12, Hugh O'Donnell requested the opportunity to parade his Homestead defenders before them. The men of the steel works planned to show that although they would fight to the end against the interests of greed, they respected the authority of the state militia and recognized the rights of property. General Snowden of the National Guard denied O'Donnell's request, and in doing so, denied workers a last opportunity to define with their bodies the significance of their recent battle.

Further denials were to follow from city boosters as well. When merchants who published the city guidebook, *Pittsburgh Illustrated*, turned their attention briefly to the topic of Homestead in the autumn of 1892, they provided little detail about what actually happened on July 6. Instead, writers for the A. L. Sailor Clothing Company explained that facts regarding the physical violence of the day were "too fresh in all our memories to need any explanation." Troubling images of dark and unruly laborers streaming through town and drowning out the rational voices of skilled workers would not be forgotten, but they would be elided from official accounts of Pittsburgh. The city's civic and business associations began narrating and promoting the story of local industrial life by connecting it to idealized images of Anglo-American workers' bodies. The press scrutiny of the Homestead lockout was not merely a setback for boosters' project of establishing a favorable idea about Pittsburgh; it was also an illustration of the high stakes and potential pitfalls of work iconography in an era of rapid technological and demographic change. Robert Cornell's diary entry on the "searious riot at Homestead" certainly understated the lockout's gravity for both the Steel City and the nation as a whole.⁴³

⁴²Rina C. Youngner, "Paintings and Graphic Images of Industry in Nineteenth-Century Pittsburgh: A Study of the Relationship Between Art and Industry" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1991): 203; Leach, "The Literature of Riot Duty," 26.

⁴³*Pittsburgh Illustrated* (Pittsburgh, 1892), 26.