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Title-page photo: Several strikes, involving mostly railroad men and miners, occurred in Kansas between 1877 and 1883, and Kansans expressed a variety of reactions to them. Wages usually were the principal issue. In July, 1877, miners living in the coal mines towns of Scranton, Osage City, and Burlingame left their jobs in protest against the steady reductions of their income over the previous half-decade. When the coal companies finally agreed to a modest wage increase, the miners returned to work. In the Osage county communities there was widespread sympathy for the underpaid miners, but the dispute meant sizable losses to people living there and before it was over, the strike had irritated nearly everyone. This sketch depicts a coal mining scene in Osage county in the 1870’s.

KANSAS WORKERS, like Americans generically, lived through hard times during the 1870’s. Reflecting upon the myriad miseries of wage earners, a writer for a Kansas journal believed that Kansans would soon become all too familiar with the labor strike, a phenomenon which hitherto had not disrupted life in the prairie states. The prospect did not distress him. “If it [the strike] is the only way that labor is to be justly compensated here on these prairies, then I say let them come, until wages are based where they ought always to be, upon the profits of industry.” They did appear. Several strikes, involving mostly railroadmen and miners, occurred between 1877 and 1883, and Kansans articulated an impressive range of reactions to them. By 1884 Kansans clearly had become familiar with the “labor problem,” the struggle between labor and capital.1

Until recently, historians assumed that Americans in the “Gilded Age” were generally unsympathetic with wage earners and uniformly opposed to strikes. Herbert Gutman, in a now classic essay published in the 1960’s, urged historians to adopt a more complex view of community reactions to industrial workers’ struggle for power during the “Gilded Age.” While middle- and upper-class Americans in large cities vehemently denounced strikes and workers participating in them, a quite different pattern prevailed in small industrial towns. There newspapermen, government officials, professional people, and nonworkers generally offered considerable support to mill workers or miners on strike against firms often owned by individuals who resided elsewhere. In these towns people were attached to rural or preindustrial values; there, Gutman argued, strong social and political ties, often of a personal nature, brought workers and nonworkers close together. Clearly the textbook view of oppressed and angry workers overwhelmed by the hostile agents of capitalism did not apply to

these communities. The time had come, Gutman concluded, to revise the standard story of how labor and strikes were perceived. He implied that other studies would reveal that perceptions were diverse and complex.  

Recently another scholar found evidence supporting Gutman’s thesis. He studied a strike in Michigan lumber towns during the 1880’s. In Saginaw valley communities people assisted striking lumbermen. This scholar, too, called for additional studies of community reactions to 19th-century industrial disputes.

Diversity principally characterized the responses Kansans expressed in communities affected by strikes in the late 1870’s and early 1880’s. These communities were generally quite small, usually ranging in population from a few hundred to a few thousand. Although their towns were overwhelmingly rural in orientation, Kansans shaped a set of perceptions of labor unrest which paralleled the widely varied reactions in the nation’s more populous industrial centers. Individuals in some towns condemned all strikes as evil, futile attempts to interfere with a marketplace mechanism controlled by the laws of supply and demand. Strikers they viewed as anarchists and communists, aliens all. Other Kansans approved the strike as a legitimate device by which oppressed workers gained redress for grievances against their employers. Still others reacted ambivalently. A strike they believed was often a necessary, even laudable, attempt to correct the power imbalance between workers and bosses; yet, simultaneously, they disapproved of strikes generally because they frequently fostered violence, invariably inconvenienced the public, and retarded the growth of business. When a local posse or state militia entered a labor dispute to end it, varied were reactions in those communities to which these men were sent. While some communities applauded this display of force, other towns denounced the “invasion” as an unwarranted violation of local communities’ authority to police their own affairs. Occasionally in their protest against the use of militia, townspeople would gather, affirm their support for workers on strike, and formally resolve to censure those authorities responsible for sending troops.

The first strikes to receive widespread attention in Kansas happened in a period of social and economic growth mixed with hardship. Population in Kansas increased to over 990,000 during the 1870’s, a decennial gain of about 170 percent. Most of the increase came with the arrival of migrants from other states. A sizable number of foreign born also migrated to Kansas, including Germans, Irish, British, and Scandinavians. Between 1870 and 1880 the number of foreign born grew from about 48,000 to over 110,000, an increase of over 120 percent. Kansas became “the state of the immigrant.” During the 1870’s over 75 percent of the state’s residents were born elsewhere. People settled on farms or in small communities. There were no large cities in Kansas. Leavenworth, with a population of 17,000, was the largest community. Only five communities in 1870 had a population in excess of 4,000; 10 years later only six had more than 5,000 residents.

Many of those who came expected to prosper. A Kansas gazetteer proudly asserted in 1870: “Kansas deserves a glorious future, and she is bound to realize it... Prosperity is sure. She had all the resources that go to make a great State...” In the decade that followed there were certain signs of rapid growth. The number of mills and manufacturing establishments increased 90 percent, the third highest figure among all states. And the rate of growth in capital invested in manufacturing was higher than that of any other state. Finally, the state attained the third highest rate of growth in aggregate value of manufacturing output. This agrarian state was industrializing rapidly.

Although industrial growth was impressive, many Kansans suffered economic hardship in the mid-1870’s. Business failures doubled and, one observer later recalled, “Banks suspended

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4. Ibid., p. 449.
5. Ibid., p. 433.
Its Unfortunate Result—And Where, at Least, a Portion of the Blame Rests.

The circumstances of the difficulty last week, on the line of the Kansas Central Railway, which resulted in the death of Wm. B. Hartman, has been discussed so thoroughly through almost the entire county, and so many conflicting accounts have been given of the affair by those who claimed to be eye witnesses of the tragedy, and there are so many conflicting opinions entertained by many of our best and leading citizens, that it has been impossible to gather any details which if given to the public would not be contradicted by some one who claimed to be present and know all about the difficulty, that we in this account will try to confine ourselves to the general features about which there is less dispute. The facts, as near as we can glean them, of the origin of the trouble, is that the contractors, McCrystal & Shire, refused to settle with the laborers, and there were circumstances which caused an almost universal belief among the men, that it was the design of the said contractors to cheat them out of their pay. This state of affairs, of course caused considerable excitement, and on Thursday they organized under the leadership of Hartman, with the object of preventing the company from laying ties upon that portion of the road just finished until they had received their pay. On Thursday night, at the call of the company, Sheriff Williams summoned a posse of some ten or twelve, and armed with the rifles belonging to the militia company of this city, proceeded early Friday morning to the end of the track. There they found the strikers organized and determined to enforce their demand of pay. "No pay, no track-laying." Such was the intimidating art of the strikers that the track layers, much assured by the Sheriff of promises refused to go to work. All the contrary is asserted by many, who are well satisfied that the leaders of the band made some uncalled for threats, used language toward the Sheriff, L. T. Smith and others more forcible and eloquent. Evidently about this time of the proceedings a liberal supply of whiskey, which the strikers or some of them had access to, helped to increase rather than diminish the difficulty in the way of a settlement of the trouble. As there was evidently nothing else to be done, the Sheriff and his posse returned to Holton, and the president of the road to Leavenworth, with, as he said, the determination of bringing up hands that would go to work, and men who would arrest or keep off the strikers. On Friday however, before Smith and his party left the end of the track, negotiations were attempted. Smith assured his men that if they would get their time checks from Shire he would pay them their money, but owing to some reason, we cannot tell what, there were so many conflicting reports, Shire failed to come to time, and the men were not paid. When the Sheriff with his posse, consisting of Capt. Tough, Ed. Gillett, Fred who heard will never forget. Many of our citizens who had retired were awakened from their sleep by the stricken woman's walls, as the party sadly wound their way across to the residence of Mr. Drake. Soon after the shooting a warrant was sworn out and placed in the hands of Sheriff Williams for the arrest of Tough, who at once took him into custody. After the farmers were notified that their money was ready, and the payment was commenced soon after, and the track layers were permitted to go to work without molestation. The indignation of the workmen and citizens generally, at what they considered a cold-blooded murder, was intense, and threats of lynching were freely made, though nothing of the kind was attempted. It was not until late in the afternoon that THE EXCITEMENT IN HOLTEN reached the highest point. This was occasioned by a number of citizens of Jefferson township coming down and representing that Sheriff Williams had released Tough on his own recognizance, and that he, Tough, was armed to the teeth, and that there was a probability that they intended to run the priser through to Leavenworth without an investigation. At the instance of County Attorney Broderick a warrant was sworn out and placed in the hands of constable Adair. A large number of our best citizens voluntarily offered their services and accompanied the constable to the depot with the object of enforcing Tough's arrest, and for no other purpose. The one side, over drawn blood and thunder account published on Monday in the Leavenworth Times extra did our town and citizens great injustice. Those citizens who composed Adair's posse were law-abiding, and were there for the purpose of having law executed, not violated. Tough and his party were evidently scared, however, and when it was found that they could not evade an arrest the train quickly reversed and carried them back to Cireleville. Shortly afterward they quietly ran down again to Holton and stopping the train at the water tank, a half mile above the depot, the whole party walked across to the hotel. It was a coincidence, which, we presume, was something but pleasant to Captain Tough, that as the prisoner and his guard were hurrying across the track streets to the hotel, they met the party taking Hartman's heart-broken wife to the side of her murdered husband, and heard her calls of sorrow. On Sunday morning the prisoner was taken before Justice Ransom and put under bonds of $10,000 to appear for preliminary examination, October 21st. Up to this writing, while the excitement has quieted down somewhat, the indignation felt by the citizens generally seems to be as deep as ever. While we would not be understood as in any manner justifying the unlawful means taken by Hartman and the rest of the citizens, who are so anxious to secure pay for their labor, we wish to state that the railroad company for bringing up a lot of desperate
in several cities, and hundreds of persons were involved in the severest distress. The depression... was felt by all classes... Business conditions improved in 1875 and after. Laborers, however, experienced a decline of about 20 percent in their wages between 1875 and 1880. When a state official interviewed a number of workers during this period, one of them summed up labor's lament: "When I came [to Kansas], labor was... well paid, but for the last seven years things have been rapidly growing worse." 9

When railroad workers and miners went on strike wages usually were the principal issue. Railroad construction and mining grew rapidly during this period. Over 2,000 miles of track were built, and in the 1870's the tonnage produced by coal mines multiplied twentyfold. By 1880, 6,700 men worked on the railroads and half that number labored in the mines. 10

While two thirds of the foreign born engaged in occupations were farmers, a substantial number worked in the transportation, manufacturing, and mining industries. About 1,600, half of whom were Irish, labored on the railroads in 1880, and approximately 1,100, more than half of whom were British, worked in the coal fields. Albeit these figures were not large, of the total employment in the railroad industry and mining, the foreign born constituted 24 and 34 percent, respectively. At that time the foreign-born component of the state's entire population was 12 percent. 11

Although overrepresented in the labor force employed by railroads and mines, the foreign born did not attract conspicuous attention during the strikes of the late 1870's and early 1880's. One recent study, however, found that in the coal-mining towns of southeastern Kansas a large influx of European immigrants led to disruptive ethnic conflict during strikes. In 1880, though, the population of Crawford and Cherokee counties was still overwhelmingly native and white; only six percent of the counties' residents were foreign born. Natives may have felt antipathy toward this sparse immigrant population. That hostility, if it existed, was probably muted in 1880 when miners joined together to resist coal operators' attempts to use blacks brought from Kansas City as strikebreakers. 12

AS DID AMERICANS generally, many Kansans recognized during the summer of 1877 a novel social crisis. In mid-July railroadmen in the East struck the Baltimore and Ohio and the Pennsylvania railroad companies; for two weeks the often violent strike activity spread, seemingly from city to city and from state to state. "The whole internal trade of the Union was suspended," an observer later recalled. "Millions of dollars of capital were paralyzed, thousands of enterprises were confronted with ruin, and the whole country was threatened with a crisis such as it had never experienced before." 13 There had been earlier strikes but none had the scope or the violence of this upheaval.

Contagious enthusiasm for strikes, reported the Leavenworth Times, even afflicted chil-

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12. The percentages of foreign born in Cherokee and Crawford counties are calculated from statistics in ibid., p. 433. For the discussion of the immigrants' experience in these counties, see William E. Powell, "European Settlement in the Cherokee-Crawford Coal Fields of Southeastern Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly, Topeka, v. 41, n. 2 (Summer, 1975), pp. 150-163.
A group of boys employed by a Leavenworth factory walked out, demanded a wage increase of 25 cents per week, and then "marched out into the street, saying their manhood demanded that they should be respected." In fact the "Riots of 1877" did not lead to numerous work stoppages among Kansas workers. They did, however, attract much attention. Most Kansas railroadmen did not join the work stoppage begun by Baltimore and Ohio employees, but they publicly affirmed their sympathy for those on strike. In several towns, moreover, they did threaten to quit work if not given a wage increase. One was granted, which probably averted a major strike.15

A few violent acts occurred. Near Emporia, for example, railroad switches were spiked, and in Newton, when an individual recommended that strikers be shot, workers petted him with eggs, causing him to leave hastily for Wichita.16 For a time strikers in Kansas City, Mo., appeared ready to cross the state line to compel workers in Wyandotte and Kansas City to shut down their railroad depots. Employees of one Kansas railroad company, however, resolved to defend the property of their employer: "we consider the interests of the railroad company our interests. . . . we as employees . . . stand ready at all times to aid the company in the protection of their property from any acts of lawlessness or violence."17

The proximity of the riots to Kansas prompted many Kansans to comment. Sol Miller, Republican from Troy, former antislavery advocate and editor of the oldest continuous newspaper in the state, saw the upheaval as the logical gesture of desperate, impoverished workers. If employers refused to pay workers an adequate wage, he concluded, then always the laborers will "set it by force."18 To the editor of the Osawola Independent, J. W. Roberts, this expression of sympathy for strikers was seriously wrongheaded. The "worst elements in society" had instigated the riots. "Wicked, oppressive, and cruel" strikers had assaulted innocent capitalists. Other editors believed the riots were the work of un-American revolutionaries and communists. Noting that Kansas had been spared the catastrophe, the editor of the Fort Scott Monitor remarked, "The communistic element seems to disappear as the [labor] movement approaches the West." He believed that Western wage earners were "a better class than their brethren of the East . . . ."19

As other critics of the strikes were doing, some Kansans called for the establishment of militia trained to suppress labor disturbances. The treasurer of the Gatling Gun Company urged Kansans to obtain "a sufficient number of Gatlings to meet such emergencies" as no other arms could match their "unequaled efficiency."20

More often than not, newspapers in Kansas towns expressed ambivalent attitudes on the strikes. They agreed that wretched working conditions, for which "great Money Despots" and "soulless cormorants" were responsible, often compelled workers to engage in violent strike activity. Simultaneously, they criticized strikers for the inconvenience and the damage caused by their desperate efforts to improve their conditions.21 The two Atchison papers illustrated perfectly this viewpoint and that both Republicans and Democrats shared it. The Daily Champion, a staunchly Republican paper, bemoaned the harsh realities which rendered labor desperate and violent. Two days later it denounced the acts of desperate men propelling the country toward "poverty, suffering and finally annihilation."22 One day the Democratic Daily Patriot remarked that labor was engaged in a noble contest to win more adequate wages and rise above poverty. Yet the next day the editor censured "loafers

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15. Topeka Daily Commonwealth, July 24, 28, 1877; Dodge City Times, July 28, 1877; Atchison Daily Patriot, July 31, 1877; Fort Scott Daily Monitor, July 26, 1877.
18. Weekly Kansas Chief, Troy, July 26, 1877. Comments about the political persuasion informing Kansas newspapers are based upon, in part, the discussion of county newspapers found in Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, 1877-1878 (Topeka, 1878); Third Biennial Report, 1881-1882 (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1883); Fourth Biennial Report, 1883-1884 (1885).
19. Osawola Independent, July 25, 1877; Wichita Eagle, August 2, 1877; Topeka Daily Commonwealth, July 26, 1877; Fort Scott Daily Monitor, July 26, 1877.
20. Emporia News, August 3, 1877. See, also, Olathie Mirror and News Letter, August 2, 1877; Wyandotte Gazette, August 3, 1877; Winfield Courier, August 2, 1877; Edgar T. Wees to Gov. George T. Anthony, August 2, 1877, in Kansas State Adjutant General, "General Correspondence," archives division, Kansas State Historical Society.
21. Ottawa Republican, July 26, 1877; Chase County Leader, Cottonwood Falls, August 2, 1877; Newton Kansan, July 26, 1877; Osage City Free Press, July 27, 1877.
22. Atchison Daily Champion, July 24, 26, 1877.
about town” and “alien vagabonds,” and he urged men to “kill all the tramps, thieves, and vagabonds that are now pillaging the country...” 23 Similarly, the Emporia Ledger contended that underpaid, blameless workers could be expected to “see only their own conditions, feel only their own pains...” and desperately resolve to help themselves, but then condemned the strikers for disturbing the public. 24 And the Topeka Daily Commonwealth denounced “rings and rings within rings of railroad magnates [who]... cut down wages that they might add to their own gains...” but added that the wronged strikers “are not justified in trying to right their wrongs by violent means.” 25 Expressing an outlook it believed prevailed among Kansas farmers, the Spirit of Kansas saw the riots as an illustration of “what desperate measures the poor... laborer will resort to when driven to the wall by poverty, want and oppression...”. The journal criticized, however, those strikers who refused to permit strikebreakers to take their jobs at wages lower than those which had led to the walkout. 26 Another agricultural journal disapproved of strikes as foolish gestures which “monopoly organs of the country” used to make honest laboring men appear “criminal in the eyes of the people of the nation.” 27

MANY KANSANS understood and sympathized with those workers whose distress led to the “Great Riots,” but, not surprisingly, they disapproved of the violence that occurred. That intense disapproval, though, did not lead Kansans to an uncritical condemnation of subsequent strikes and strikers. Shortly after federal troops helped conclude the July disturbances, Kansans were discussing some additional work stoppages. Miners living in the coal towns of Scranton, Osage City, and Burlington left their jobs in protest against the steady reduction of their income over the previous half-decade. One worker said of his colleagues: “All they ask is a price for their labor that will allow them to live and support their families...” 28 When strikers from Scranton and Osage City traveled to Carbondale in order to persuade miners there to join the walkout, a “drunken row” ensued. At the behest of some local officials, Gov. George T. Anthony put two companies of state militia on alert and would have used them had the “row” turned into countywide riot. When the coal companies finally agreed to a modest wage increase, miners returned to work. 29

The Osage City Free Press, a Republican paper, reported the sentiments and the concerns of county residents and communities affected by the strike. Widespread sympathy was felt for the striking underpaid miners. Because they paid inadequate wages, the newspaper’s editor remarked, the coal companies deserved harsh criticism. Then the editor chided both sides in the dispute as they had refused to arrive at a compromise that would have averted the strike. Consequently, each day the dispute continued meant sizable losses to Osage county coal-mining communities. People along the railroad lines were purchasing coal produced by other counties. Toward its end the strike had irritated nearly everyone. The episode raised a hard question to answer, the Free Press remarked: “How can the miners get just prices for their work without taking the bread out of their own mouths.” 30

CONCERNS other than monetary losses troubled communities affected by a strike against a railroad company at work in Jackson county. Incorporated in 1871, the Kansas Central Railway Company intended to build a line running from Leavenworth to the western border of Kansas. Hit hard by the depression in the 1870’s, the financially weak company had by 1877 completed construction only to the vicinity of Holton and Circleville, about 60 miles from Leavenworth. 31 Although the com-

24. Emporia Ledger, July 26, 1877.
27. Kansas Farmer, Topeka, July 29, 1877.
28. Osage City Free Press, August 2, 1877.
30. Osage City Free Press, August 17, 24, 31, 1877.
Company owed its construction crew two months' pay in late September, 1877, it could pay them for only one month's work. The crew of about 150 trackmen quit work vowing "no pay, no track laying." 31

Determined to end the strike and resume construction, Len Smith, president of the Kansas Central, asked the Jackson county sheriff to use a posse to disperse the strikers. In Leavenworth, the location of the company's headquar ters, Smith hired a large group of men willing to help break the strike. To head this group Smith employed William Sloan Tough, whose surname was apt as he had earned the epithet "paladin of the Kansas border." As a young man he had hunted the deadly Quan trill; later, he had been a U. S. marshal; and now this "born horseman and dead shot" assumed the leadership of those who would bring the Jackson county strike to an end. 32

The men the company recruited joined the posse the Jackson county sheriff had mustered. When this group arrived near Circleville, an eyewitness later reported, Tough chose to walk alone towards Bill Hartman, the strike leader. A brief exchange followed. "Tough . . . said . . . 'I would like to speak to you.' Hartman replied: 'You G-d d-d s-n of a b-h, you come this way another step and I will shoot your heart out!' " 33 Shortly after these shots were fired and Hartman was fatally wounded. According to one account, Tough "stood quietly with the smoking pistol in his hand saying only 'who's next.' There was no next." 34 Apparently no one wished to tangle with the notorious Tough, and the strikers dispersed. 35

Hartman's death and the company's use of Leavenworth men to subdue the Jackson county strikers outraged townpeople in Hol ton and Circleville. Overwhelmingly rural, Jackson county's manufacturing consisted of two flour mills, three shops producing wagons and carriages, and one broom factory whose capital totaled 50 dollars! Although relying upon the Kansas Central for access to more populous Kansas towns, Jackson county residents defended the railway workers and expressed contempt for the "foreign brigands" from Leavenworth who helped break the strike. When some of the strikebreakers approached the small town of Holton, an enraged crowd of 200 threatened them swearing "to get his [Hartman's] bloody assassin." Hartman had been, insisted the editor of the Holton Recorder, "a dear husband, a kind father, sober, hard-working . . . and law-abiding citizen." The invading Leavenworth gang, on the other hand, were drunken ruffians known to be "notorious as regarding a human life." At several public meetings during the week following Hartman's death, people in the Holton-Circleville vicinity aired their contempt for Leavenworth and pledged themselves "to use all lawful means to bring the

31. Holton Recorder, October 4, 1877; Topeka Daily Commonwealth, October 2, 1877.
33. Fort Scott Daily Monitor, October 3, 1877.
34. Schaeffer, "Incidents in the Life of Tough," p. 12.
35. For other accounts, see Atchison Daily Champion, October 2, 1877; Fort Scott Daily Monitor, October 3, 1877; Leavenworth Times, October 2, 1877; Topeka Daily Commonwealth, October 3, 1877.
36. Ibid.
murderer to justice.” Later, however, following a change of venue, William Tough was exonerated in the Shawnee county district court.

Temper in Jackson county were not soothed by the insulting posture adopted by the Leavenworth Times. When the people of Holton and Circleville defended the striking railroadmen and, later, the reputation of their slain leader, the Times declared, they were inciting and abetting “mob violence, to over-ride all . . . civil authority.” Those Leavenworth citizens whom the Kansas Central had recruited simply went to Jackson county to help preserve law and order. Those who made this claim, the Holton Recorder responded, were “fools or knaves” and Jackson county people would never forget the slander published in the Times.

This brief strike showed that small towns did not have to be industrial in order to lend support to those on strike. Much of the support Holton and Circleville gave workers came in response to the railroad company’s decision to end the strike forcibly, in part, by using Leavenworth recruits. The towns resented this invasion as it preemipted the authority local communities had for preserving law and order.

The proper locus of authority for preserving law and order in labor disputes would be an issue debated fiercely in 1878 during the first major strike to occur in Kansas. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company employed 85 percent of the 6,500 men who worked on Kansas railroads. When the Santa Fe management put into effect a 10 percent wage reduction in April, 1878, engineers and firemen quit work. A wildcat strike, the work stoppage did not receive the support of the national railroad brotherhoods. Strikers intended to prevent Santa Fe locomotives from moving into or out of major depots like those in Topeka, Emporia, and Atchison.

Strikers spiked switches, disabled locomotives, and turned over and burned some freight cars at Topeka and Emporia. When C. F. Morse, the Santa Fe general superintendent, and some other company employees attempted repeatedly to clear the tracks and move engines between Topeka and Emporia, wrathful strikers, some armed with pistols, attacked them and the engines. Strikers yelled at one engineer attempting to take an engine out of the Topeka depot: “Scab, you better order your coffin. . . we'll be sorry for your face when you return.” Another employee later claimed that he “kept the mob off with a coal pick” when it tried to assault him for helping clear the Topeka depot of overturned cars and engines. At times during the dispute strikers appeared on the verge of burning depot roundhouses. Accusing Emporia's law officers of being friendly with the strikers, Santa Fe
officials asked Governor Anthony to protect the company’s property. They informed him that along the track between Topeka and Emporia strikers had rendered “things generally demolished.”

When, in his judgment, local civil officials failed to preserve law and order, the governor decided to intervene with state troops. Militia companies in Leavenworth and Independence, about 150 men in all, were ordered to Topeka. By this time, however, local law enforcement officials had restored a measure of order in those towns disrupted by the strike. Santa Fe officials later admitted as much, noting the cessation of violence and the arrest and incarceration of strike leaders in Emporia and Topeka. Still, however, no trains moved between the two cities. Viewing the strike as nearly over, the Leavenworth Times doubted that strikers posed much of a threat to the “brave troops” encamped on the grounds of the state capitol building: “The three strikers who have surrounded the . . . building have humbly announced that they will spare the lives of all prisoners taken.”

One militia company went to the Topeka depot, and the Leavenworth troops traveled to Emporia. When the militia arrived, the officer in charge later recalled, Emporians “expressed surprise at our appearance and indignation at our presence. . . .” This was an understatement; the Emporia Sun reported that “‘Soldiers are coming!’ was on the lips of every man, woman or child yet met,” and that the entire town gathered “to see the monsters as they . . . swung their muskets fore and aft. . . . used big curs-words, and charged on an old lady’s clothesline and left it bare.” The mayor observed the troops and then ordered them out of town. He, like the Lyon county sheriff, believed that Emporians were maintaining law and order, and he represented the state’s intervention. Along with the county attorney, the sheriff, and a prominent city businessman, he expressed his dismay to Governor Anthony and insisted that the troops be recalled:

We have now in our midst a band . . . of armed men who profess to come here under your orders . . . We simply consider this an insult to our civil officers and citizens. We have been and are still able and willing to protect all the property of the [Santa Fe] road and all the employees who are willing to work. We can’t make men work. . . . We hope that you will at once recall these troops and we will take care of our own affairs and if you do not we will not answer for the consequences.”

Anthony rejected their request. Then tragedy compounded the crisis in Emporia. One of the militiamen accidentally fired his pistol, killing one of the town’s clergymen. Warning of “tremendous excitement,” the troop commander beseeched the governor to withdraw the militia immediately. Anthony then ordered the troops out of town. At an open meeting Emporians expressed their outrage over the governor’s use of militia. A reporter from the Emporia Sun noted, “We heard not a word in defense of this blasting, shameful, damaging, unwarranted, unprovoked and inexcusable act. . . .” As for the troops, they were described as “a company gathered from the dark and low places of the city of Leavenworth, the most loathsome, filthy, disgusting creatures” who despoiled the “beautiful little city” of Emporia. The assembly declared that “the sending of troops here . . . without consultation with our local authorities or citizens” was “a libel on the fair name of our city.” They demanded “the fullest reparation for the insult . . .” so imprudently offered “to as peaceable and law abiding people as can be found in the United States.”

Other Kansans approved the use of militia. Topekans felt that the troops prevented additional violence in their city. Those attending a large public meeting “most heartily approved the efforts of Governor Anthony in putting down the riots. . . .” Anthony, himself, defended his action. Local officials had not been able either to protect the Santa Fe’s property or to assure the resumption of railroad operations. He understood the Emporians’ resentment and their strong tradition of localism. Communities in Kansas had the statutory right to police their own affairs. Had he only advised

42. Several Santa Fe officials described the violence done during the strike in reports submitted to Governor Anthony. “Correspondence Received,” Gov. George T. Anthony, 1877-1879, box 3, archives division, Kansas State Historical Society. For other reports on violence, see Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 5, 6, 1878; Chase County Leader, Cottonwood Falls, April 11, 1878.

43. “Correspondence Received,” Gov. George T. Anthony, 1877-1879, box 3, Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 5, 6, 1878; Emporia Ledger, April 11, 1878.

44. Leavenworth Times, April 11, 1878.

45. J. C. Walkinshaw to Adj. Gen. Peter Noble, April 11, 1878; Kansas State Adjutant General, “General Correspondence,” box for 1878-1879.

46. Emporia Sun, April 10, 1878.

47. T. N. Sedgwick, et al, to George T. Anthony, April 8, 1878, “Correspondence Received,” Gov. George T. Anthony, 1877-1879, box 5, Emporia Sun, April 10, 1878; Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 9, 1878. For Anthony’s order withdrawing the troops, see telegram to J. C. Walkinshaw, April 9, 1878, “Governers’ Letters,” George T. Anthony, v. 11.

48. Emporia Sun, April 10, 1878; Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 9, 1878. For Anthony’s order withdrawing the troops, see telegram to J. C. Walkinshaw, April 9, 1878, “Governers’ Letters,” George T. Anthony, v. 11.

49. Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 9, 1878.
the town to respect law. Emporians "still would have been justified in resenting it as an unwarranted interference." If he had blundered, at least it was "an error in the interest of law, and against anarchy." To Santa Fe officials the governor had not blundered but acted decisively and effectively. "The strike was not broken," claimed the company's superintendent, "until it was made apparent that the law was backed by an armed and organized force and then it collapsed in an instant." Newspapers in several towns joined in the defense of the governor's actions. The Topeka Daily Commonwealth argued that it would have been better had local authorities ended the strike, but—and this was the crucial point—local people "did not do enough to open up a public highway obstructed by violence . . .," and this warranted Anthony's judicious use of troops. Other newspapers criticized the strikers while they commended the governor. The Santa Fe railroad had brought the immigrant and prosperity to Kansas towns, observed W. T. McElroy of the Humboldt Union, and W. G. Allison of the Iola Register praised the governor for using troops to prevent ruffians and anarchists from continuing to interrupt its operation. The ineluctable laws of supply and demand were inscribed on ancient tablets, according to E. G. Manning of the Winfield Courier, and a strike was a senseless and futile attempt to violate them. As a rule, Kansans respected these laws, and he maintained that strikers would never find "a strong sentiment in Kansas that will sustain them in an attempt to dictate to their employers. . . ."

Such sentiment did in fact exist. Numerous Kansans upheld the strikers' position in the Santa Fe dispute. And they levelled intense criticism at Governor Anthony's strike-breaking tactic. "The whole system of corporation government now-a-days," claimed John E. Rastall of the Osage County Chronicle, "is to make men mere machines," with their strike the railroadmen had asserted their humanity. The editor of the Holton Signal forecast additional eruptions like the Santa Fe strike until railway employees obtained satisfactory wages and safer working conditions. Reliance upon troops to break the Santa Fe strike dishheartened Frank C. Scott, owner of the Workingman's Courier: "It is a pretty State of affairs when a militia company is ordered to take up arms against the laboring man . . . We do not countenance any move whereby the laboring men of Kansas are shot down in their tracks. We are law-abiding, but we think the matter could have been settled differently." The Leavenworth Times felt that equitable benefits would accrue to labor only when responsible state government officials fostered industrial harmony. D. R. Anthony, the editor of the Times who said of himself, "as an enemy, one had better choose some other man," ridiculed his cousin's handling of the crisis. The governor had made a complete "ass of himself. . . ." Use of the militia put an unnecessary burden on the state's treasury and insulted outrageously the people of one county. The Executive Office had become "a competitor with the Lunatic Asylum. . . ." Emporia's newspapers, not surprisingly, echoed loudly criticism of the governor. His shameful deeds, the Sun declared, should have caused "a tear to trickle down the cheek so long unaccustomed to be thus dampered." To those newspapers which accused Emporia of having encouraged anarchy the Ledger replied, "Any and every paper, east, west, north or south of Emporia, whether upon the authority of railroad officers, or anybody else, which asserts that lawlessness did prevail in Emporia . . . asserts a lie." 52

THE UPROAR over the use of militia and the accidental death of the Emporian minister was, in the opinion of one Kansas historian, "too great a millstone for Anthony's administration to survive." 53 Ironically, the man whom Anthony helped select as his successor, John St. John, would soon encounter a labor crisis similar to the Santa Fe fracas. Strikes in 1877 and 1878, the state adjutant general reported, "aroused the instinct of self-preservation and stirred the military spirit of the citizens of Kansas, which resulted in the formation of numerous independent companies of militia." 54 When striking coal miners in southeastern Kansas prevented coal companies

52. Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 9, 1878; Humboldt Union, April 13, 1878; Iola Register, April 13, 1878; Winfield Courier, April 13, 1878; Osawatomie Independent, April 13, 1878; Great Bend Register, April 9, 1878.
53. Osage County Chronicle, Burlingame, April 11, 1878; Holton Signal, April 10, 1878; Leavenworth Times, April 11, 1878; Workingman's Courier, Independence, April 11, 1878; Larned Chronicle, August 3, 1878; Girard Press, March 24, 1878; Emporia News, April 12, 1878; Emporia Sun, April 10, 1878; Emporia Ledger, April 18, 1878. 54. Zornow, Kansas, p. 132.
THE COAL MINERS' STRIKE IN CHEROKEE COUNTY.

During the latter part of April, 1886, trouble was apprehended among the coal miners in Cherokee county, Kansas. Messrs. J. A. Bovard & Co., and Messrs. Keith & Henry, of Kansas City, Missouri, are the owners of coal mines at Stilson and Scammonville, and usually employ about 200 men. The miners had been on a strike about two months previous to April, 1886, and the proprietors of the mines determined to employ colored laborers. The "Miners' Union" or "League" decided that neither white nor colored laborers should go to work unless they were members of said Union. It was estimated that this "League" could put from 400 to 500 men in the field on half a day's notice. On the 21st of April, 1886, Mr. A. S. Dennison, Sheriff of Cherokee county, sent a telegram to the Governor of Kansas, setting forth these facts, and stating that he was not able to protect the lives and property of persons of said mines. The following is a copy of the telegram referred to:

COLUMBUS, KANSAS, April 21, 1886.

GOV. JOHN P. ST. JOHN: A. Bovard & Co., and Keith & Henry, of Kansas City, have coal mines at Stilson and Scammonville, and work almost two hundred men. The mines at said mines have been on a strike for the last two months. J. A. Bovard & Co. and Keith & Henry have determined to put colored laborers to work in their mines. The "League" has decided that colored laborers, either colored or white, shall not go to work, unless belonging to said Union. The "League" can put from four to five hundred men in the field on half a day's notice, and will do it. In view of above facts, we are not able to protect the lives and property of persons at said mines, and I consider lives and property at that point in great peril. Immediate assistance is necessary. Answer quick.

(Signed)

A. S. DENVINSON, Sheriff of Cherokee County.

The following telegram had previously been received from one of the proprietors of the coal mines:

TO HIS EXCELLENCY GOVERNOR ST. JOHN: Last week, myself and myself sent fifty colored men to Stilson, Kansas, to work the coal mines. I was informed that a large body of strikers, who refused to work, threatened the colored men, and the sheriff advises me to take them away. It is urgent that you protect them and our property against the colored men. The Wyandotte Guards will be sent down there, I will arrange with the Wyandotte Guards, and I will arrange with the sheriff. Answer quick.

To the above telegram the following reply was sent:

J. A. BOVARD, KANSAS CITY, Mo.: I have your letter, and the Wyandotte Guards are on their way. My men are abundantly able to protect the colored men. I have notified the sheriff, after exhausting every means at his disposal, I must ask you to aid him.

(Signed)

A. S. DENVINSON
(1828-1913)
from replacing them with black workers, Governor St. John, like his predecessor, had to decide whether to use militia, knowing the resentment this would generate in mining towns.

About 150 miners in 1880 worked the 15 mines producing bituminous coal in Cherokee county. In February mine operators in Kansas City ordered a wage reduction affecting employees in the towns of Stilson and Scammonville. The miners, members of a “Miners’ Union” or “League,” quit their jobs and shut down the mines. For several weeks their contest with the companies was a standoff. Then J. A. Bovard, leader of the mine operators, decided to break the strike by sending 100 black “exodusters” to work in the Stilson mines. Enraged strikers vowed they would not allow “a bunch of niggers to take our places in the shafts.” The “League” recruited 400 to 500 men who met the train carrying the black workers; threatened by the miners, the blacks refused to approach the mines. The Cherokee county sheriff informed Bovard of the incident and advised him to return the blacks to Kansas City. Bovard then wired Governor St. John requesting that he provide protection for the blacks and the companies’ property.

St. John replied that he would use militia only if county officials could not resolve the crisis. The Cherokee county sheriff informed the governor that he was, in fact, unable to protect the lives and property of persons at said mines; moreover, he considered “lives and property at that point in great peril” and requested “immediate assistance.” Later he explained why he could not muster a sufficient number of deputies to end the crisis. His county’s town population consisted mostly of miners and their families who backed the strike, and farmers in the countryside were busy “at work planting” and would not leave their homes to assist him. A Topeka newspaper reported that, indeed, in the county’s towns widespread sympathy for the strikers made it impossible for the sheriff to recruit there an adequate force of deputies. Many, moreover, were “so much in awe” of the striking miners that they would not aid the sheriff.

Governor St. John then put militia in several counties on alert, and he sent the state adjutant general to Cherokee county accompanied by a few armed assistants. When he met with the strikers, the adjutant general informed them sternly of their choice: they could return to work or they would see their jobs given to the blacks brought from Kansas City. If the operators had to employ the blacks, then the state would use all force necessary to prevent any interference by the strikers. This forceful ultimatum apparently broke the strike as the miners resumed work.

As had Emporians, individuals in Cherokee county resented the state’s intrusion. Although prepared to use several militia companies, the adjutant general had brought only a few troops to Cherokee county. Strikers denounced this “invasion” bitterly. “We think the action of the

57. Ibid., p. 49.
58. Topeka Daily Commonwealth, April 27, 1880.
59. Kansas Adjutant General, Second Biennial Report, p. 50; Topeka Daily Commonwealth, May 7, 1880; Leavenworth Weekly Press, April 29, 1880; and for communication relating to the militia alert and the reasons for it, see Gov. John F. St. John to L. N. Woodcock, April 21, 1880; St. John to P. S. Noble, April 22, 1880; St. John to Willis Brown, April 23, 1880, in “Governor’s Letter,” John F. St. John, v. 26, archives division, Kansas State Historical Society.
The first major strike in Kansas involved Santa Fe railway engineers and firemen in 1878. Violence resulted in Topeka and Emporia, and Governor Anthony called out the militia. Some state newspapers like Col. E. C. Manning’s Winfield Courier criticized the strikers and supported the governor’s use of troops. The Winfield editor wrote that the strike was a senseless and futile attempt to violate the ineluctable laws of supply and demand, and strikers would never find a strong sentiment in Kansas that would sustain them in an attempt to dictate to their employers.

operators in bringing troops here [was] nothing less than a shot at . . . our rights,” the miners declared in a resolution the Columbus Border Star printed. The Border Star, a Democratic paper, remarked at the time of the adjutant general’s arrival, a “military company, armed cap-a-pie, . . . has come] to strike terror into the hearts of the poor but honest . . . citizens of this place. . . .” How could citizens respect government officials who permitted men without “grit . . . in their craw’ to invade territory and to insult good citizens?” When he reflected on the sequence of events in the strike, the editor of the Border Star was reminded of “the old game of deserts since the world began—protection for the capitalist employer—bayonets for the laboring employee.” 46

A N ADDITIONAL strike in this period occasioned widespread comments about the labor problem. In 1883 the Brotherhood of Telegraphers struck Western Union and demanded a salary increase and an eight-hour day. The national telegraphers’ action did not interrupt the telegraph business in Kansas. A few operators quit work but enough remained at their jobs so that business continued as usual. 41

Although the state’s telegraph service remained unaffected by it, the strike received considerable coverage in Kansas newspapers. When telegraphers returned to work without a salary increase, some newspapers noted that their failure illustrated again that workers and their unions could not manipulate the laws of supply and demand. The editor of the Republican Wichita Eagle, for example, believed firmly that the supply-and-demand mechanism could not “be broken down by strikes . . . [which were] never successful.” Other editors criticized the strike as an outrageous attack upon well-meaning business interests. This dispute, as had others, led to violence. He had been conspicuously sympathetic towards strikers in the 1877 riots, but now the editor of the Weekly Kansas Chief concluded that strikes were so often violent that the public needed an effective device to prevent their

60. Columbus Border Star, April 30, May 14, 1880.

occurrence. Perhaps a law prohibiting strikes was the answer.  

The editor of the Atchison Globe disagreed with those "men in town" who advocated making a strike a felony. Prohibiting strikes would mean that in their struggle with employers laborers would be "compelled to work at any wages offered . . . or be mulcted as a criminal or disturber of the peace." Some critics of the telegraphers had directed their hostility at unions. R. H. Ballinger, editor of the Republican Larned Chronoscope, disagreed with those who alleged that unions were "a destroyer of capital," endangering society. This was "a superficial view of these vast organizations." In their efforts to defend wage earners, unions at times initiated industrial conflicts, but, he argued, these strikes were often necessary and frequently resulted in a "just compromise." The staunchly Republican Lawrence Daily Journal defended the telegraphers and accused the Western Union Com-

pany of so mistreating its employees that it deserved "the censure of the whole country." To H. B. Kelly, the Republican editor of the McPherson Freeman, the strike revealed the need for government control of the telegraph system. Perhaps government regulation would prevent unjust treatment of employees, making less likely a recurrence of violent conflict. Addressing rural folk, the Kansas Patron and Farmer observed that the strike, like many other labor disputes in the previous years, was awakening people to the need for fundamental social and political reform.

Whether telegraphers in 1883 or railroadmen in 1877, time and again during this period dissatisfied workers made small-town rural Kansans aware of the strike and labor's grievances. Reactions to these labor disputes varied so widely that, considered together, they fit no simple stereotype. Some

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A strike in 1883 by the Brotherhood of Telegraphers against Western Union for a salary increase and an eight-hour day did not interrupt the telegraph business in Kansas, but the strike received considerable coverage in Kansas newspapers. As with the Santa Fe strike editors in the state took differing views on the workers' action. H. B. Kelly of the McPherson Freeman suggested that the strike showed there was a need for government control of the telegraph system. Perhaps government regulation would prevent unjust treatment of employees, making less likely a recurrence of violent conflict, he wrote.
were prostriker, others were antistriker, and still others were ambivalent. Reactions among small-town newspapermen, including those of both Republicans and Democrats, could be found in each group. Some towns cheered the use of militia to break strikes; others, however, protested against this tactic.

Hostility toward strikes and strikers was certainly one of the diverse sentiments Kansans expressed. Through the looking-glass darkly, some small-town Kansans saw strikes as damnable assaults upon capitalism. Notwithstanding their appearance on the prairies, strikes were considered un-American. J. W. Roberts of the Osvalos Independent held an even dimmer opinion. He judged all strikes as did noted economist and moral philosopher Lyman Atwater: "conspicuous attacks against the laws of God, the rights of man, and the welfare of society." Other Kansans, while they sympathized with underpaid workers, disapproved of strikes as useless efforts to alter the natural laws of supply and demand. The sentiments of these small-town journalists matched rather well negative comments about strikes Herbert Gutman found in large-city newspapers.  

Many Kansans fashioned a more complex, ambivalent perspective. Often they would catalog the various severe problems borne by impoverished workers and then conclude that strikes were understandable, even necessary, manifestations of labor distress. They criticized vigorously those corporate interests whose callous policies they alleged drove desperate workers to strike. Work stoppages, however, invariably deprived some Kansas towns of products or services they desired or needed, such as coal for fuel or the transportation of freight and passengers. This inconvenience and the violence that sometimes happened during strikes led otherwise sympathetic Kansans to reprimand strikers and insist that they return to work or permit willing workers to replace them.

In small-town America, Herbert Gutman argued, a rural, agrarian ethos emphasized human relationships characterized by mutual respect and interdependence among men in varied occupations. Nonworkers adhering to this ethos often gave support to those laborers on strike as they recognized that with industrialism came social patterns destructive of values they cherished. "There is a certain irony," Gutman concluded, "in realizing that small-town America, supposedly alien and antagonistic toward city ways, remained a stronghold of freedom for the worker seeking economic and social rights."  

What Gutman found in the small industrial communities he examined also existed in those Kansas towns which demonstrated support for the workers' cause in labor strikes. Striking workers in Kansas received their greatest support in coal-mining towns. Here miners and their families were a large proportion of the residents. Holton, Circleville, and Emporia, however, were not "industrial towns;" yet they, too, publicly and vocally defended local workers allegedly abused by corporations allied with misguided government officials.

Much of the sympathy and support workers found in Kansas towns, no doubt, reflected the pattern Herbert Gutman found elsewhere. But there was another dimension to the Kansas story. Although he did not analyze its consequences in labor disputes, Gutman implied that small-town Americans were torn by strongly ambivalent feelings about industrialism. Translocal corporations, for example, were both "cheered" and yet remained "always suspect." They were cheered because of the economic growth they often brought to rural communities; they were always suspect because they diminished the town's sense of mastery over its own affairs and control of its economic future. Rural townspeople, therefore, naturally resented and criticized harsh conditions of employment corporations imposed, seemingly capriciously, upon wage earners residing in their communities. They recognized that strikes often provided a means of protesting against these corporate practices. But they feared that the stoppages would also interrupt the community's progress toward the golden prosperity boosters of industrialism promised. Their ambivalence toward strikes and strikers reflected a gradual and somewhat awkward attempt to assess the costs and the benefits of industrialism.

Editorials in one Kansas newspaper illustrated these mixed feelings. During the miners'
strike in 1880 the Columbus Courier sympathized with workers, criticized companies for mistreating their employees, and then denounced caustically the governor’s use of troops in the dispute. Yet toward the end of it, the newspaper had grown impatient with the strikers. When the strike was over, the Courier’s editor relaxed. Work in the mines had resumed and with it prosperity. To those who might have avoided the county because of its labor troubles, the newspaper declared, “Our people are happy and contented; are making money and getting neat and comfortable homes. If we do have a little muss in the coal mines occasionally, what of that? It is not every . . . [county] that has a coal mine.”66 Implicitly he was suggesting that the benefits derived from industrial activities more than equalled the social costs.

No issue in these strikes proved more vexing than the use of force to conclude them. Some Kansans may have agreed with the editor in Cottonwood Falls who considered the governor’s use of militia in the Santa Fe strike a divinely inspired blessing.67 Those towns to which a hastily deputized posse or militia company was sent, however, usually were enraged by this invasion. In these “island communities” workers and nonworkers joined together to protest this assault upon their power to run their own affairs. Local autonomy, Robert Wiebe noted in his Search for Order, lay at the heart of democracy in the 19th century island communities. In the transition from an agrarian to a more industrial society, no struggle, Wiebe argued, had more drama than the resistance small communities offered to translocal institutions whose expanding power challenged the towns’ independence.68 Emporians and Kansans in other communities were players in that drama. When standing against company and government officials whose policies trimmed their independence, Emporians and others spoke proudly of their towns. Their pride was expressed in the motto of the Weekly Kansas Chief: “Talk for Home, Fight for Home, Patronize Home.”

THE STORY of these Kansas strikes does not conform to standard stereotyped generalizations and cliches concerning Americans’ response to labor problems in the “Gilded Age.” Neither does it fit perfectly the pattern Herbert Gutman set forth in his essay. Small-town Kansans reacted in sharply divergent ways to early labor disputes and the issues they raised. No single pattern can be found in their responses. Studies of strikes in other states during this period probably would reveal similarly diverse reactions. For Kansans did not experience alone the complex social strains industrialism brought to rural communities. And others no doubt discovered, as Kansans did, that there existed no easy way either to diminish the likelihood of strikes or a larger problem, to balance the benefits and the costs of industrial growth. During later labor disputes some Kansans urged government mediation of employer-employee conflicts. Rural Kansas in 1885 became one of the earliest states to establish a government agency with this responsibility. Other Kansans argued that the solution to the labor problem lay in a thorough reform of social and economic life. In the 1890’s they prescribed populism as the anodyne for the woes of both wage earners and farmers.

66. Columbus Courier, May 6, 1880.
67. Chase County Leader, Cottonwood Falls, April 11, 1878.