

Name: Brad Pietryga, M. Ed.

Title: Homestead 1889-1892 and the Fall of a Labor Republic

Subject: American History (11th Grade)

State: Pennsylvania

**Abstract:**

Many approach the Homestead Strike of 1892 as a singular violent event that occurred between management and workers. But what caused this great display of violence that would define an era? The answer is complicated, but an introductory answer can be found by reviewing (and comparing) the results of the 1889 Homestead Strike, an event of which few have heard, which the results of the 1892 strike. Two displays of disagreement, two displays of violence, two contracts/agreements, and yet two very different outcomes. The success of the workers in the 1889 Homestead Strike only fueled the fire for what would become the fall of the strongest union in Homestead, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers in 1892, a blow to unions that would last decades into the 1930s.

**1. Introduction, overview, and unit rationale**

In the postwar years after the Civil War, steel production significantly increased in the United States, causing an influx of capital investment in the industry, as well as an increase in available jobs. In many instances, this encouraged immigration from around the world to come to the United States. The parties involved in this economic situation ultimately experienced conflict when profits, working conditions, and competitive labor.

In a United States History course, the Homestead Steel Strike (and the corresponding 1889 strike) shows students how management and labor dealt with conflict in two different ways, ultimately leading to the enforcement of property rights for management and a defeat in labor rights for workers. This lesson answers big questions: Should the state use force to protect property? Should workers have ownership in their labor? Should conflict ever lead to violence?

Students will explore the concepts of contracts, property, labor, capital, and violence in this lesson. These concepts not only relate to the 1889 and 1892 Steel Strikes, but to the ongoing relationship between Capital and Labor in our society.

## **2. Unit goals**

Students will be able to differentiate between the 1889 and 1892 in regard to change in working conditions that precipitated conflict.

Students will be able to evaluate the impact of labor relations between the Carnegie Steel Company and the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers in relation to the national (and in many cases, global) growth of steel production.

## **3. Connections to state standards**

- Standard - 8.1.12.A  
Evaluate patterns of continuity and rates of change over time, applying context of events.
- Standard - 8.2.12.A  
Evaluate the role groups and individuals from Pennsylvania played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the US and the world.
- Standard - 8.2.12.B  
Evaluate the impact of historical documents, artifacts, and places in Pennsylvania which are critical to U.S. history and the world.
- Standard - 8.3.12.D  
Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations in the U.S. have influenced the growth and development of the world.
  - Ethnicity and race
  - Working conditions
  - Immigration
  - Military conflict
  - Economic stability

## **4. Detailed description of what will happen each day.**

This lesson is meant for a 2-day class period (or equivalent block), but can be adapted based on the extension of reading materials, discussion, and/or instruction.

Anticipatory Set:

A fundamental concept in this lesson (and in modern society) is the concept of a contract. What should be included? Who decides?

Engage the students in a discussion of a “classroom agreement.” What rules/procedures should we cover? Have students “pitch” some rules/procedures; the instructor should “pitch” some too. Some examples may be: “Go to the restroom without asking,” “No homework,” “Bring food into class.” Keep it casual and fun, but try to draw out some conflicting interests. This will help students understand the balance between desires, objectives, and order in the classroom. Is this

something the instructor would be willing to accept? Are some of the things the instructor presented rules/procedures that students would accept?

Instructional Process:

Instruction will come in two parts: the 1889 Strike and the 1892 Strike. The readings/materials for these two parts are as follows (these can either be done as homework in preparation, or in class through guided discussion and instruction):

1889:

- Basic instruction on the Sliding Scale, Amalgamated Association (Unions), Homestead Works (Upgraded facility)
- July 14, 1889 News Article describing the end of the strike
- July 1, 1889 Artifact News Article describing beginning of the strike (optional)

1892:

- June 25, 1892 news article before strike
- July 1892 Contract (Box 3 Folder 3, William Martin Papers, 1866-1933, AIS.2005.06, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System)
- July 7 news article violence
- [Harpers Image \(Eintracht Hall\)](#)
- [Photograph of Militia in Munhall](#)
- Frick Assassination article, July 25, 1892
- End of strike article Nov 21, 1892
- Large news article reviewing Battle of Homestead, July 6, 1892 (optional)

(news articles can be found in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette archives or Newspapers.com)

After the anticipatory set, the instructor should transition to the importance of contracts between workers and management in companies. They define the rules, procedures, and (most importantly in this case), payment of the workers. Explain to the students that steel had become a very popular industry after the Civil War through the development of the Bessemer Converter (Bessemer Process). This development helped to make steel more profitable by faster production. This also meant that skilled ironworkers were able to be replaced with more unskilled labor. The devaluing of labor led to the creation of labor unions, the most famous of which was the Knights of Labor, but the most relevant to this lesson is the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers. Labor Unions banded together to push for better wages and improved working conditions.

When management and labor did not agree on terms of a contract, this typically led to a strike...and sometimes strikes led to violence. The Homestead Strike of 1889 is one example where workers pushed for better wages and improved working conditions and won. Read the July 14th News article to get a better idea of how this happened. Ask the students: what are the workers fighting for? What happened while they were on strike? Did they get what they asked for?

At this time, instruction transitions to the Strike of 1892 (also a great time to end the class and begin the next day, if using the 2-day model).

The instructor will review the outcome of the 1889 Strike (a 3-year contract that appeased workers and avoided the Carnegie “sliding scale” that roughly tied payment of workers to the market value of steel). Give a simple prompt to students to help them connect that 3 years after July of 1889 is July of 1892.

Have students spend some time reviewing the reading/instructional materials. Make sure to review them in chronological order. Are students seeing similar elements between the two strikes? Payment? Violence (and to what extent)? Disagreement between labor and management? Have students draw some comparisons verbally, either with the whole class or using a “Think, Pair, Share” model. Help students review some of the sources by moving around the classroom and posing questions to each small group.

At the end of this discussion and review of the resources, have students fill out a Venn Diagram showing “Elements Unique to 1889,” “Elements Unique to 1892,” and “Elements Shared by Both Strikes.” Alternatively, have the students create a side-by-side compare and contrast chart with the two strikes. This will be used for formal assessment of the activity.

Conclusion and Closure:

Help students draw the connections between these two important strikes. Explain that 1889 was an unprecedented success for the Homestead mill and the Amalgamated Association, whereas the 1892 strike was an unprecedented failure of violent proportions for labor (a failure that would echo into the 1930’s. These three short years witnessed the rise and fall of a Labor Republic, as described by Paul Krause, in which labor had beaten the mighty capitalists of Carnegie Steel. It would end in horror in 1892 through the violent use of Pinkerton soldiers. This singular event (along with the preceding events in Homestead) defined labor/capital relations in the United States for several decades.

## 5. Formal and informal assessment

Formal assessment:

- Students will create a graph (Compare and Contrast, or Venn Diagram) using the information provided by the presentation, handouts, and readings.
- Students will create a discussion board post (either written out or posted on a platform such as Google Classroom, based on classroom resources) that draws a conclusion about similarities and differences of the strikes.

Informal assessment:

- Instructor will evaluate participation in the comparison activity, joining discussions with students about the details they are reviewing.
- Instructor will ask students questions about their work to review comprehension and understanding.

## 6. Technological needs and Material needed to complete the unit

Instructors will need:

- Preferred presentation materials (PowerPoint, Google Slides, Projector and/or SMART Board)
- Digital or hardcopy handouts of contracts, readings, and comparative graphs (if templates are used)

Students will need:

- Paper and pen/pencil
- Chromebooks/iPads/Computer (optional) for additional research

## 7. Other sources to consider

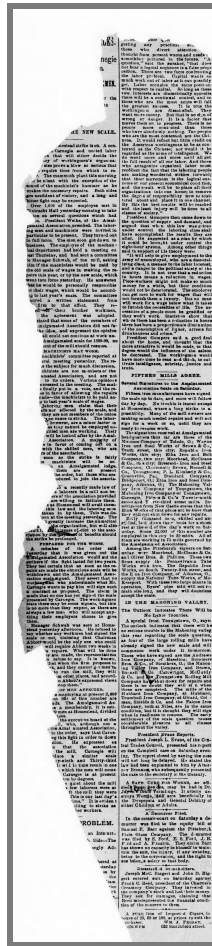
Krause, Paul. "Chapter 17, 'The Homestead Lockout of 1889: The Making of a 'Worker's Republic'." *The Battle for Homestead: Politics, Culture, and Steel 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel*, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA, 1992, pp. 240–251.

Marcus, Irwin; Bullard, Jennie; Moore, Rob. "Change and Continuity: Steel Workers in Homestead, Pennsylvania, 1889-1895," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 111, No. 1 (Jan., 1987) pp. 61-75.

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/20092075?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20092075?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

Zweig, Jason. "Business Headlines, 1889: Workers Shut Down Homestead Steel Plant." *Wall Street Journal*, 7 July 2014,

[www.wsj.com/articles/business-headlines-1889-workers-shut-down-homestead-steel-plant-1404766006](http://www.wsj.com/articles/business-headlines-1889-workers-shut-down-homestead-steel-plant-1404766006).



# Artifact article, 1st day of 1889 Strike



Clipped By:  
**bwpietryga**  
 Sun, Aug 14, 2022



Before 1892 Strike



Clipped By:

**bwpietryga**

Sun, Aug 14, 2022

**THEY SURRENDER.**

**The Great Homestead Strike  
Abandoned to Pass  
Into History.**

**A VOTE OF 101 TO 91 SETTLED IT.**

**Bitter Fight Waged Among Leaders at  
the Last Meeting.**

**BUT A MERE HANDFUL ATTENDED.**

**Ten Men Decided a Labor Dispute Whose Events  
Have Thrilled the World.**

**LAWRENCEVILLE ALSO BREAKS.**

**Some Say That Leniency Will Be  
Shown in the Trials.**

**CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE WAR**

The little spark of life that has been lingering in the great Homestead lockout passed out of it in a storm yesterday morning. It is now a thing of the past. The final official action has been taken, and the strike has been declared off. The Homestead mills of the Carnegie Steel Company are now open to the union workmen of the world. Their organization obligations have been sent aside by 101 men who voted to declare the mills open, and that signifies that any union man, or anyone else, can go to work there if he can get a position. To the workmen of Homestead who formerly were employees of the Carnegie company it means that they are at liberty to return to work whenever they can get a chance. They go as individuals, not as organized men. It is each man for himself and the lucky man gets the position. There can be no order in the retreat. It will be a free-for-all, pell-mell rush in which the number of those who will be everlastingly lost in the shuffle, will far overreach the number who will reach the goal, a position in the mill they felt just 120 days ago feeling confident they would win. They have been defeated for a long time, but it did not come out until yesterday when in the cold, winter's air the Homestead men realized something must be done and they did it.

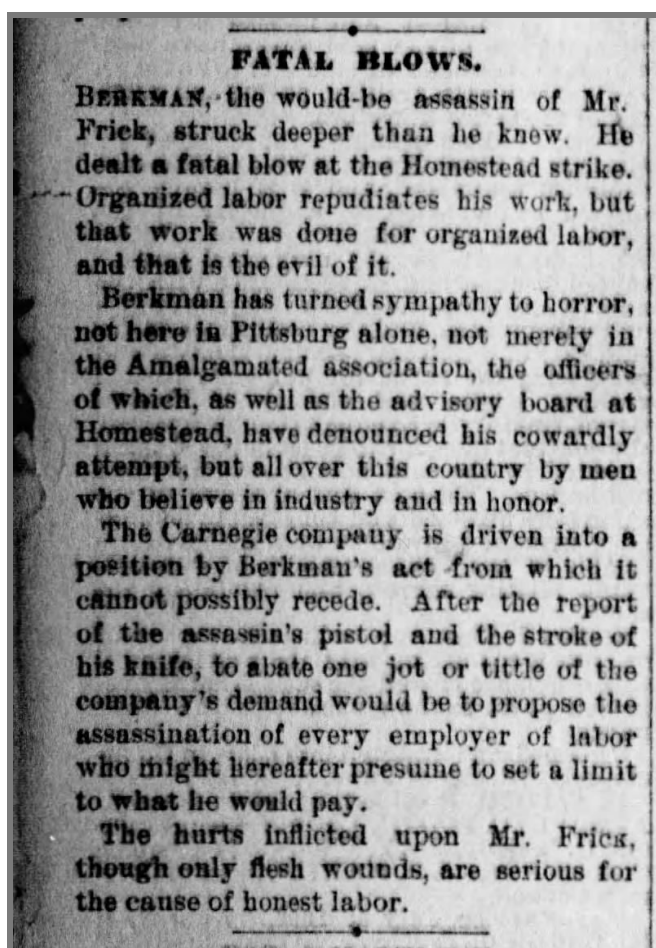
The big lockout was called off in a meeting that began Saturday afternoon. The lockout began to gasp for breath then, and the death rattle was plainly heard. Nothing being done at that time to bring matters to a crisis, and as the dying strike perished in living, those who attended the meeting went home with the understanding that the final wrestle with it should take place yesterday morning at 10 o'clock.

# End of 1892 Strike



Clipped By:  
**bwpietryga**  
Sun, Aug 14, 2022





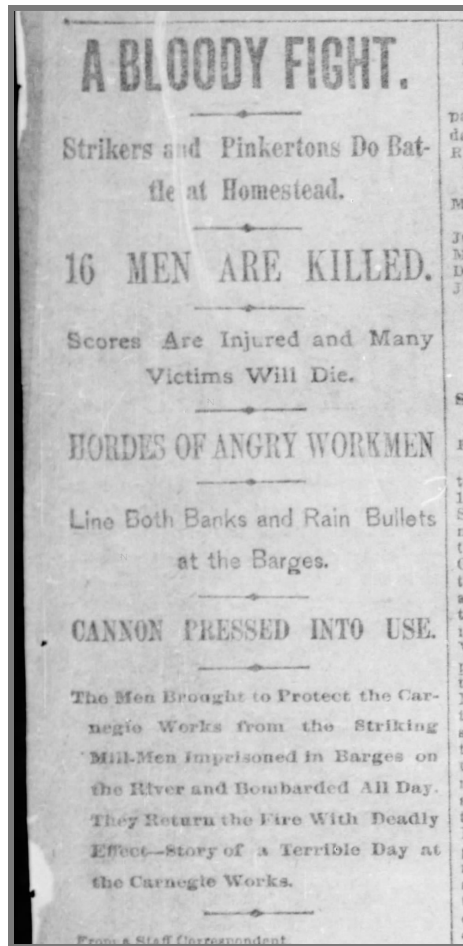
## Frick Assassination



Clipped By:

**bwpietryga**

Sun, Aug 14, 2022



## Violence in 1892



Clipped By:

**bwpietryga**

Sun, Aug 14, 2022