
KANSAS POPULIST NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL RESPONSE TO THE HOMESTEAD AND PULLMAN STRIKES: AN APPLICATION OF SEWELL'S THEORY OF STRUCTURE

BRUCE CARRUTHERS
University of Kansas

Scholars disagree on the reasons the Populist and industrial-labor movements failed to achieve a political coalition. Some attribute the cause to a backward-looking Populist ideology that searched for solutions in an imaginary yeoman republic. Populists neither understood nor had sympathy with the problems facing late nineteenth-century industrial workers. Essentially, Populists engaged in status politics. Others argue that Populism was a progressive movement that accepted industrialization but sought to bring it under government control through a political coalition of the producer class consisting of farmers, workers, and small businessmen. I argue in this paper that the editors of Populist newspapers in Kansas attempted to promote a coalition by utilizing the labor theory of value to educate farmers that their fate was linked to that of workers. I employ Sewell's theory of structure, specifically his axiom on the transposability of schemas, to illustrate the editors' transposition of the labor theory of value into a schema that defined the 1892 Homestead and 1894 Pullman Strikes as contests between the producer class (including farmers) and monopoly capital. I further argue that in addition to accounting for routine change, Sewell's framework is useful in examining how groups attempt to make sense of altered social contexts resulting from large-scale social dislocations. I reviewed Populist newspaper editorials on the strikes from

Bruce Carruthers is a PhD student in sociology at the University of Kansas. His primary interest is in social movements, particularly recruitment and retention of members. Inquiries should be sent to bcarruth@ku.edu.

communities throughout Kansas. In all, over 200 newspaper editions were examined. Spatial dispersion of sources and the two-year interval between strikes served as a check on regional and chronological variations.

Introduction

In this paper, I examine evidence from Kansas Populist newspaper editorials on the 1892 Homestead Strike and the 1894 Pullman Strike to address the issue of Populist support for a political coalition between farmers and workers. First, the paper provides a survey of relevant scholarship on the question a Populist-labor coalition, including a brief description of the historical context informing this scholarship. This is followed by a sketch of Populism in Kansas and of the Homestead and Pullman Strikes. The theoretical perspective and application section analyzes the editorials within William Sewell's framework of structure, duality, agency, and transformation (1992). Here I discuss the editors' application of the labor theory of value schema to the strikes to define these industrial conflicts as directly relevant to the economic condition of farmers, and as a way to encourage agrarian support for the industrial-labor movement. Information on the source and nature of data used in the study is followed by an analysis of the data including representative examples of editorials. Last, a discussion of the applicability of Sewell's framework to the study's findings is provided.¹

Survey of Scholarship

In the decade from the mid-1880s to the mid-1890s, the Populist Movement challenged the dominant political parties and attempted

¹ Simply stated, the labor theory holds that all value emanates from the person who makes a product. Capitalists make their profit by expropriating a share of this value. Larger profits are made by expropriating a larger share of the producer's value (McMath, 1993:51-53; Destler 1944:336-338; Wilentz 1984:83-94; Sellers 1991: 152-164; Miller, Worth Robert 1996:237). See Sewell 1980, especially Chapter 7, for a discussion of the emergence of the labor theory of value in France.

to redefine the meaning of the American Republic. Emerging from the Farmers' Alliance, Populism sought to bring the surging industrial economy under government control. The movement envisioned a cooperative commonwealth that utilized the power of state and federal governments to promote fair treatment of all citizens and to ensure that the tremendous material advances of the industrial revolution were more evenly distributed. Populists identified several sources for their financial ills: railroads that charged exorbitant rates to ship their crops and that controlled state and federal legislatures; grain elevator operators who colluded with railroads to short them on the value of their crops; middle men who speculated in grain futures; and eastern capitalists and financiers responsible for high matériel costs and low crop prices and for implementing the gold standard. These institutions and the men who ran them were often grouped together under the term monopoly capitalism or plutocracy (Farmer 1924; Hicks 1931; Goodwyn 1978; Miller, Worth Robert 1996; Cronon 1991).

The official stance of the leaderships of the Populists and of the industrial labor unions was to urge cooperation between farmers and workers. Populists recognized their mutual interests with labor and the need for labor to organize in order to effectively combat the power of large corporations. Populists further supported the right of unions to strike. Populists saw a natural affinity between farmers and workers; they both belonged to the producer class and both were being exploited by monopoly capitalists (Pollack 1962; Hofstadter 1960; McNall 1988).² Despite a concerted effort by the

² The industrial-union labor movement sought to organize workers on an inclusive, industry-wide or nation-wide basis. It must be distinguished from the craft-union labor movement, which sought to organize skilled workers within an industry. The craft-union movement was generally more conservative than the industrial-union movement. It was concerned with working conditions rather than social change, and it eschewed direct involvement in politics. The American Federation of Labor, with its motto "unionism, pure and simple," is the best exemplar of the craft-union movement. The Knights of Labor, American Railway Union, Western Federation of Miners, and the Industrial Workers of the World are representative of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century industrial unionism (McMath 1993:79, 167; Destler 1944:335-368).

Populist leadership, the hoped-for coalition never materialized (Goodwyn 1976; McMath 1993).³

The reasons for the failure of the Populists to achieve a coalition with industrial labor have been debated extensively since the end of the nineteenth century. Students of Populism fall into two basic camps: Those who picture the movement as an illogical reaction to the emerging corporate and industrial economy of late nineteenth-century America and those who view Populism as a rational response to economic and political circumstances that were working to the disadvantage of its adherents. How scholars interpret the issue of the failure of Populists to form a coalition with the industrial-union movement can be predicted by knowing the camp into which they fall. Those who see Populism as yearning for a nostalgic past fault the movement for its inability to understand the problems facing workers in an industrializing society. Those seeing Populism as a rational movement place the blame on labor's failure to understand its shared interests with farmers and the value of a coalition in promoting these interests.

Eastern U.S. historians at the end of the nineteenth century tended to view Populism in a negative light. They interpreted the Populist response to industrialization as an unrealistic longing for the past rather than as a realistic appraisal of contemporary conditions. This view was superseded by a more favorable portrayal of Populism by Progressive historians who saw Populism as the precursor to Progressivism. These historians found the origin of government intervention to correct social ills in Populist ideology (Hicks 1931; Miller, Worth Robert 1993).

Reaction to political excesses generated by the Cold War prompted the next reassessment of Populism. The body of scholarship emerging from this reassessment forms the basis of the contemporary negative appraisal of the movement. Social scientists and historians reacted to the anti-intellectualism of McCarthyism and to right-wing movements by applying sociological and psychological concepts to the study of social movements. Historian Peter

³ For a thorough discussion of People's Party's political goals, especially with respect to labor, see: Goodwyn 1976, 1978; Hicks 1931; McMath 1993; and Pollack 1962.

Viereck and sociologists Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell portrayed the Populists as victims of status politics. Essentially, this theory holds that irrational thought and action is the mode of groups whose status is threatened by rapid social change and for whom there is no practical response to the change. Since there is no rational explanation that will preserve their position in a changing world, groups engaging in status politics seek simplistic explanations in conspiracy theories. In their application of this theory to American fringe movements, Bell and Viereck found the radical right of the postwar era to be the mirror of the Populists of the 1890s. Both engaged in the politics of frustration borne by the inability to comprehend, let alone master, the complexities of a mass society (Viereck 1963; Lipset 1963; Bell 1963).⁴

Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* was the most influential of the revisionist histories of Populism. Hofstadter claimed that when the reform impulse is informed by moral issues it becomes tainted by absolutism that divides the world into opposing camps of good and evil. Such ideologies obscure the distinctions and complexities of the world. He depicted Populism as a reaction by Americans of Yankee, Protestant stock to the transformation of the U.S. economy. This group responded negatively to the economy's transition from one based on individual producers to one based on industrial corporations. Late nineteenth-century farmers were captives of the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian myth of the independent yeoman. As the postbellum economy sped the transformation of agriculture from subsistence to market driven, farmers changed their image from yeoman to self-made business men. Yet, they retained in their psyche the image of themselves as yeomen. The collapse of the boom in the late 1880s brought the yeoman identity front and center. Faced with hard times, farmers looked at agriculture before its industrialization and commercialization as the golden age. They divided society into two groups: Those possessing wealth and power on one side and the producer class on the other. Hofstadter asserted that Populists saw history as a conspiracy, a worldview they held

⁴ See also Gusfield 1963:20-24, for a discussion of the origins of status politics. Note, however, that Gusfield characterizes Populism as a class rather than a status movement.

in common with other uneducated people (Hofstadter 1960; Miller, Robert Worth 1993; Handlin 1963).

In sum, scholars in this camp find Populism essentially a radical-fringe movement. It drew its membership from the isolated and dispossessed—from those being bypassed by the fundamental transformation of the economy occurring in postbellum America. The Populists' failure to understand the complexities of a changing world led them to an irrational worldview. They embraced producerism, an ideology that enshrined a gloried vision of a Jeffersonian democracy and that was wholly unsuited to an industrial world. These scholars ascribe the Populists' failure to achieve a coalition with industrial labor to the movement's failure to understand the concerns of workers. Labor and Populists might have agreed on impact of monopoly capitalism on workers and farmers, but they did not share the same vision of the future. Theirs was a commonality of style rather than substance. Workers were proletarians with an interest in class-based legislation; farmers were middle-class businessmen with an interest in market-based prosperity. Populist Movement tenets favoring a small-producer economy had little appeal to employees of mass industries (Hofstadter 1960; McNall 1988).

The modern favorable interpretation of Populism was a reaction to the consensus history of the Cold War period. Several works published in the 1960s defended Populism as a rational response to economic difficulties and as a progressive force in American politics. National and regional studies—two of which focused on Kansas—found Populism to be a class-based movement that accepted industrialization but not capitalism, which it believed alienated and degraded the individual. Populists welcomed the material advantages promised by industrialization, but rejected the unbridled competition of a *laissez-faire* economy. The Populists saw a clear community of interests between themselves and labor. Workers, however, were unable to see their shared interests with the Populists and continued to vote Democratic. Despite this, Populists did achieve substantial cooperation with labor in Texas and the far West. (Miller, Worth Robert 1993:59; Pollack 1962:11-24; Woodward 1963; Nugent 1963; McNall 1988; McMath 1993; Goodwyn 1978).

As seen by scholars who present it in the most favorable light, Populism is portrayed as a progressive social movement. It intended nothing less than the reformation of the American society. Populism attempted to change the philosophical underpinnings of the economy from competitive to cooperative. According to these scholars, Populists made a faithful attempt to encourage labor to join ranks with them.

Historical Background

Populism in Kansas

Populism in the West was fueled by expectations of market-based prosperity founded on rapid settlement and expansion of agriculture. Between 1880 and 1890, the populations of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Minnesota—commonly referred to as the Middle Border—increased by 43, 134, 278, and 67 percent, respectively. This increase was promoted by government and railroad interest in the rapid conversion of the Great Plains to productive agriculture. Following the Civil War, the federal government engaged in an unprecedented effort to develop the West. It granted land directly to railroads to spur development as well as ceding land to states to encourage building tracks. In all, over 129,000,000 acres of public land were given, directly or indirectly, to the railroads. During the 1870s and early 1880s railroad construction opened western Iowa, western Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakota Territory for settlement (Hicks 1931).

This intensive settlement required huge amounts of capital but migrants were not a ready source of it. Most were not wealthy; they arrived with a small stake, often barely enough to establish a homestead. Capital was available, however, from the railroads and eastern investors. Investment money was so plentiful that some lenders canvassed farmers to secure additional mortgages. More than was necessary or wise was often lent (Hicks 1931; Farmer 1924; Nugent 1963).

The consequence of this frenzy of lending was an exceptionally high incident of mortgaged farms. The booming land values of the 1880s, fueled by bumper crops and high prices, disguised the true

magnitude of the problem. When compared to other states, the per capita mortgage debt in the Middle Border ranked well toward the top despite the relative poverty of the states' inhabitants. The situation in Kansas was the most extreme. In 1890, over sixty percent of Kansas acreage was mortgaged compared to the national average of twenty-nine percent. In fact, private debt in Kansas was the worst in the nation (Hicks 1931; Miller 1925; Clanton 1969; Argersinger 1974; Nugent 1963; Miner 1986).

As it seems to be with all good things, the boom came to an end. In the late 1870s and through most of the 1880s rainfall was above normal in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. Agriculture flourished as a result. In 1887, the rhythms of nature brought prosperity to an end. From 1887 through 1897, only two years saw sufficient rainfall to guarantee a full crop. In five of those years, rainfall was insufficient to produce crops at all (Hicks 1931; McNall 1988; Miller, Worth Robert 1996; Miner 2002, 171; Miner 1986).

If the drought was not bad enough, falling crop prices soon added to the region's woes. U.S. overproduction and foreign competition led to declining prices throughout the 1880s. Wheat sold at \$1.19 a bushel in 1881 but only for 60¢ a bushel by 1890. Corn sold for 63¢ a bushel in 1881 but only for 28¢ by 1890. Market prices seldom equaled the cost of production. These conditions continued well into the 1890s (Miller, Worth Robert 1996:246; Farmer 1924; Goodwyn 1978; Miner 1986).

The combination of drought and falling prices was a calamity for Kansas. Land values and real estate transactions decreased precipitously. As residents rushed to sell their holdings, prices crashed and credit dried up. Farmers needing cash no longer had access to the easily-secured land mortgages of boom times. Declining land values made them unattractive to investors. Instead, farmers often had to secure loans with their livestock and machinery at much higher rates, often from twenty to thirty-six percent (Farmer 1924; McNall 1988; Miner 1986).

The Farmers' Alliance entered Kansas in 1881. By 1890, the Alliance had over 125,000 members. In response to a growing chorus of voices calling for reform and third-party action, County Alliance presidents met in June 1890 with delegates from the

Knights of Labor and other reform groups and launched the People's Party. The People's Party was a dominant political force in Kansas throughout the first half of the 1890s. It elected a governor in 1892 and retained control over a substantial portion of the state legislature (Clanton 1969; Goodwyn 1978; McNall 1988; Argersinger 1974; Miner 2002).

Homestead and Pullman Strikes

The 1892 Homestead Strike and the 1894 Pullman Strike were two of the most violent and notorious strikes of the 1890s. Both strikes involved substantial loss of life, were highly publicized, and resulted in government intervention, including the use of military force.

The Homestead Strike began in June 1892 at the Carnegie Steel Works in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Both management and labor prepared for the strike in advance. The union organized its 3,000 plus men in military fashion to prevent the importation of scab labor and to ensure that the plant did not resume operations. H. C. Frick, the plant manager, secured 300 Pinkerton agents on June 25 to guard the plant. He also refitted barges with protective plating to ship replacement workers to the mill. On July 6, Frick sent the 300 Pinkerton guards up the Monongahela River on the refitted barges to occupy the plant. The strikers met the Pinkerton guards on the river and at the plant site. When it became apparent that the Pinkertons planned to occupy the plant, the strikers broke through the fence around the plant and met them at the dock. Armed Pinkertons began to disembark. Strikers fired on them and on the Pinkertons still on the barges. The Pinkertons returned fire at the strikers and at townsfolk, including women and children in the crowd. The steamer towing the barges departed, leaving the Pinkertons marooned. A running gun battle continued for the rest of day. Strikers threw sticks of dynamite at the barges and they poured oil on the river and attempted to ignite it. The Pinkertons, many of them unemployed workers who believed they were hired for unarmed guard duty, finally accepted the advisory committee's offer to surrender. Angry strikers and townsfolk burned the barges

and attacked the Pinkertons. At the end of the day, seven Pinkertons were killed and twenty wounded. Strikers and townsfolk suffered nine dead and over forty wounded.

On July 12, Pennsylvania governor Pattison sent over 8,000 well-armed state militiamen to Homestead. With militia protection, Carnegie management occupied the plant and brought in scab labor to operate it. Frick arranged to have seven members of the strike advisory committee arrested and charged with murdering Pinkerton guards. He also arranged to have several strikers arrested on lesser charges. None were found guilty, but the tactic succeeded in having a demoralizing effect on the strikers. As winter approached, the workers lost heart; they voted to end the strike on November 20 (Filipelli 1990; Wolff 1965).

The nationwide 1894 Pullman Strike began in May as a local action against the Pullman Palace Sleeping Car Company. A month into the strike delegates from Pullman presented their case to the annual American Railway Union (ARU) convention being held in Chicago. Eugene V. Debs, the ARU president, was sympathetic but argued against a proposed boycott of Pullman cars. The convention chose to ignore Debs's cautions and decided to proceed. It instructed Debs to attempt a negotiated settlement with Pullman. Failing that, the ARU was determined to launch a boycott. George Pullman refused to meet with the union delegation saying he would negotiate only with individual employees. On June 22 the ARU convention approved a boycott. It began on June 26.

The railroads and their allies were prepared. On June 23, U.S. Attorney General Richard Olney directed U.S. district attorneys and law enforcement officials to protect trains carrying United States mail. The Justice Department had recently ruled during the Great Northern Railroad Strike that every car of trains carrying U.S. mail was protected by federal law. Therefore, any attempt by the ARU to boycott or to separate Pullman sleeper cars from a train pulling a mail car would be treated as a violation of federal statute. The railroads exploited this ruling by ensuring that trains carrying Pullman sleepers also had mail cars.

Coincident with Olney's actions, the railroad Chicago General Managers' Association (GMA) moved against the boycott. Among

other things, the GMA agreed to discharge workers who participated in the labor action. The ARU responded to this tactic by calling a general strike that succeeded in bringing rail traffic to a halt in much of the nation. The boycott tapped a wellspring of resentment and by June 27 nearly 100,000 workers were on strike and twenty railroad lines were tied up. Before the strike ended, nearly one quarter of a million workers was out and railroad traffic in most of the Midwest, Southwest, and West was stalled or completely halted.

The GMA sought assistance from the Justice Department, which issued an injunction against the ARU on July 2. The injunction served two purposes. It authorized the use of federal troops and it provided grounds to bring charges against Debs and other members of the union leadership. Ironically, two laws originally designed to reign in the power of railroads, the Interstate Commerce and Sherman Antitrust Acts, provided the legal justification for the injunction.

Debs ignored the injunction and continued the strike. Violence erupted at Blue Island, just outside of Chicago, when a federal marshal attempted to read the injunction to strikers. President Cleveland ordered U.S. Army soldiers to Chicago. Thereafter, federal troops were used throughout the country to quiet trouble spots. With Army intervention, the strike quickly came to an end. Between July 13 and July 17, rail traffic was fully restored. The strike was declared over on August 3 (Filipelli 1990; Papke 1999).

Theoretical Perspective and Application

In his theory of structure, duality, agency, and transformation, Sewell argues that structures are simultaneously composed of virtual schema and actual resources. Schemas are not the formal codification of social and economic behavior found in laws and contracts, but “the informal and not always conscious schemas, metaphors, or assumptions presupposed by such formal statements” (Sewell 1992:8). Schemas are not rigid or fixed. Rather, they can be generalized to new situations. Since schemas cannot be defined by their existence in any particular time, location, or situation, they are necessarily a virtual phenomenon. Resources are both nonhuman and human. Nonhuman resources are manufactured or naturally

occurring objects that people use as sources of power. Human resources are the characteristics of people—their physical and mental attributes—that can also be used as sources of power. Resources are obviously unevenly distributed in society, but all actors exercise some control over resources, including their employment and definition (Sewell 1992).

Structures are formed through the intersection of schemas and resources. Resources are given their meaning by cultural schemas. For example, oil is simply an organic substance until humans turn it into a source of energy. Schemas are likewise influenced by resources. The depletion of oil reserves will force the search for alternative sources of energy. Thus, structures possess a duality. They are composed of schemas and resources that reinforce and sustain each other over time (Sewell 1992).

If resources and schemas simply reinforced one another, they would reproduce each other without change. However, change does occur but most structuralist theories attribute its source to outside influences. Sewell argues that social theory must be able to account for change generated by the actions of a society's internal structures. He proposes five axioms to account for change, one of which is particularly relevant in this study, the transposability of schemas, which means social actors can apply schemas to situations outside of the schemas' origins. "To say that schemas are transposable, in other words, is to say that they can be applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they are initially learned" (Sewell 1992:17). In other words, schemas are not simply rules that are mechanically applied; they are principles that can be applied to new situations

Sewell's framework is designed to account for change that occurs in the ordinary course of events. It is also useful, however, in examining how groups attempt to make sense of altered social contexts resulting from large-scale dislocations. For example, when circumstances change so that governing schemas no longer provide adequate explanations of economic or social conditions, a group's response can be studied in terms of its employment of alternate schemas to redefine the situation. Status politics provides a good example. Faced with declining economic and social

status, marginalized groups apply schemas that find explanations in conspiracy theories. The emergence of a collective ideology in the United States during the depression of the 1930s is another example. The profound failure of a system informed by a schema of individual responsibility led many citizens to redefine the proper role of government to include a collective responsibility for the welfare of citizens.

I argue that the editors of Populist newspapers in Kansas employed schemas inherent in the labor theory of value to interpret the use of human and nonhuman resources in a way that depicted the struggles of the Homestead and Pullman strikes as a part of the larger struggle by the producer class to direct the benefits of the industrial revolution to the broad citizenry rather than to the capitalist plutocracy.

Unlike the southern branch of the Populist Movement that was born of decades of poverty, western Populism was fueled by a sharp and profound failure of the market economy. Settlers migrated to Kansas with the expectation of becoming prosperous farmers who would benefit from the growing market economy. They did just that until drought, falling prices, and debt at the end of the 1880s shook their confidence in unbridled capitalism.⁵ Kansas Populists responded to these crises by questioning the underlying assumptions of the market economy. They saw the emergence of monopoly capitalism as distorting the values of the Republic and as depriving those who generated the wealth of the country from receiving their fair share. In Sewell's terms, the Populists rejected capitalist schemas of private ownership and free labor as valid definitions of the economic and political context of late nineteenth-century America. They also redefined the uses of human and nonhuman resources, i.e., workers, production facilities, and railroads. In place of existing schemas, the editors employed the labor theory of value. They used this schema to picture labor's confrontation with capital not as an abrogation of American values of the sanctity of property rights and of individual as opposed to collective action,

⁵ See Goodyn 1976, 1975 and Woodward 1963 for a detailed discussion of the origins of southern Populism. Destler 1944 contains an excellent discussion of the origins of Populist anti-monopoly ideology and of its pro-Jacksonian ideology.

but as an affirmation of republican values that held America was the material expression of an ideology that embodied the promise of the ascendancy of the individual over monied interests.

The editors did not retreat to a Jeffersonian and Jacksonian vision of America as a land of yeoman farmers and independent craftsman. Instead, they accepted the industrial revolution and embraced its promise of material progress, but offered a vision of its realization that would provide industrialization's benefits to all citizens. With regard to labor's struggles, the editors supported workers rights to organize and to strike as a countervailing force to the power of capitalist plutocracy and its corrupting influence on the government. The concept of free labor was rejected as inherently unjust in a world of concentrated economic power.

The editorials in Kansas Populist newspapers provide a good opportunity to apply Sewell's theoretical constructs. The application of the labor theory of value to industrial conflict illustrates the transposability of schemas. The editors applied the labor theory of value to human and nonhuman resources of workers and industrial production. They transposed the schemas inherent in the labor theory of value, which originated in an earlier time and in a craft setting, to collective industrial-labor union efforts. The rights of craftsman—based on individual ownership of the means of production—were transposed to industrial wage workers. As important, the editors transposed the labor theory of value from a schema that defended the rights of craftsman against industrial production to the situation of entrepreneurial farmers.⁶ The interests of farmers, essentially individual producers in a market economy, were transposed to be consistent with industrial workers, essentially a proletarian class. This was accomplished by couching the struggle between labor and management in class terms and by defining farmers' interests as coincident with labor's interests. Last, the human resource of workers' labor (and, by implication, farmers' labor) was interpreted as the fundamental source of wealth rather than as

⁶ With few exceptions, the Republican newspapers in these communities interpreted the strikes in terms of traditional schemas. That is, they pictured the strikes, especially the Pullman Boycott, as unacceptable and un-American interference with free enterprise and free labor.

a market commodity, and the nonhuman resource of the means of production was interpreted not as a matter of private ownership but a common good to be regulated for the benefit of all citizens.

Source and Nature of Information for the Study

I reviewed newspaper editorials from Kansas Populists newspapers for June, July, and August of 1892 and 1894. In all, over 200 editions from eighteen journals throughout the state were reviewed. All editorial were reviewed for comments on the Homestead and Pullman Strikes. Representative examples are provided in the findings section below. (See the appendix for a list of newspapers and their locations.)

Before moving to the examples, it is important to know that I examined an equal number of Republican newspapers in the same communities. I did this to ensure that the labor theory of value was not characteristic of rural Kansas editorials, regardless of the political affiliation of the newspapers. To a paper, the Republican journals supported capital and upheld the principles of private property and of the individual over the collective.

The Homestead and Pullman Strikes were selected for several reasons. Both strikes were notorious. That is, they received wide coverage in local and national media. Both involved the use of the military to confront strikers. The strikes are separated by two years so they provide a measure of the consistency of editorial response over time. They occurred during the period of greatest Populist strength in Kansas, so they reflect the response of Populism to industrial strife during its heyday. Lastly, the nature of the strikes provides a test of the editors' commitment to labor. The Homestead Strike took place half a continent away from Kansas and did not directly impinge on residents of the state. In contrast to Homestead, the Pullman Boycott halted rail traffic throughout the West and in much of the East. Geographically and financially, the potential impact of the ARU boycott on Kansas farmers was real and potentially costly. Given this, one might reasonably anticipate that the Pullman Strike would generate a different, potentially more negative response from editors.

Findings

Several themes emerge in the editorials on the Homestead and Pullman Strikes that confirm the efficacy of applying Sewell's theoretical approach to the interpretation the editors gave to these events. They are: definition of the violence associated with the Homestead Strike as the fault of capital; denunciation of government intervention on the side of capital in both strikes as illegitimate; framing the strikes in terms of class struggle; and explicitly portraying the strikes in terms of the labor theory of value. Each is discussed in turn and illustrative examples are provided.

Populist newspapers throughout Kansas chose to blame the violence at the Homestead Mill on Andrew Carnegie and his manager, H. C. Frick. They consciously ignored the fact that strikers illegally occupied the plant—the private property of Carnegie—and that the Pinkerton guards were hired to secure the plant's return to its rightful owner. The editors applied schemas to this issue in both expected and unexpected ways. The idea that the use of military force is a legitimate function of only the government can be seen as consistent with accepted cultural values. Republican and Populist newspapers characterized Carnegie's use of Pinkerton guards as an illegitimate use of armed force and both called for outlawing private armies. However, ignoring the strikers' armed seizure of private property and the claim that government military forces should not have been used to protect the mill required the imaginative application (transposition) of schemas to the nonhuman resource of the Homestead Mill and the human resource of the strikers, the Pinkerton guards, and the Pennsylvania state militia. The labor theory of value was blended with concepts about the role of government and the military to portray the strikers as the victims of unconscionable actions by Carnegie and the governor of Pennsylvania. The editors defined the strikers' seizure of the plant as a defensive action on the part of workers rather than as the violation of property rights. The strikers were depicted as defending their right to the source of wealth they produced—wealth that was necessary to their and their families' existence. The nonhuman resource of the mill was defined as the legitimate property of workers, and the human resource of

the Pinkerton guards—men hired by Carnegie and Frick to reclaim their property—was defined as thugs and murders rather than as upholders of property rights or simply unemployed workers seeking a living. The deployment of the state militia was defined as the illegitimate use of a government resource to protect the interest of capital rather than the interests of all citizens. Carnegie and Frick were redefined from captains of industry to brutal oppressors.

Some representative examples will help illustrate this point. The July 14 edition of the St. Francis *People's Defender* asserted that “the only thing the general public seems to regret is that Carnegie was not on the barges with his hired murders” and “eight thousand armed soldiers have been sent to the rescue of Carnegie et al., at Homestead, Pa.” A July 15 editorial in the Fredonia *Alliance Herald* depicted the Pinkertons as Hessians. The *Kiowa Review* condemned Carnegie on July 20 for having the leaders of the Homestead Strike arrested for defending themselves against “invasion by an armed force of Pinkertons.” The July 21 issue of the *Alliance Gazette* in Hutchinson applauded the workingmen at Homestead who fought the Pinkertons to a standstill. It lamented the bloodshed but allowed that “the killing of everyone who insults the law and labor and public decency by hiring this band of professional killers and armed terrifiers [*sic*] would be another good thing so far as results are concerned.” On August 4 the *Gazette* published an editorial cartoon showing Carnegie ordering Pinkerton thugs into action against the strikers from the safety of his castle in Scotland. The *Council Grove Courier* published the same cartoon on August 5 (see figure 1 on next page).

Pervasive criticism of government support for capital was a recurrent theme in both strikes. This critique was much broader than the simple condemnation of the deployment of the military in specific incidents. The editors portrayed the government as the servant of capital rather than as fulfilling its proper role as servant of all the people. They protested the use of the military and of the courts as weapons against the producer class, and they pictured government officials, especially President Grover Cleveland, as toadies of the plutocrats. Given the violence associated with both strikes and the potential financial impact of the Pullman Strike,

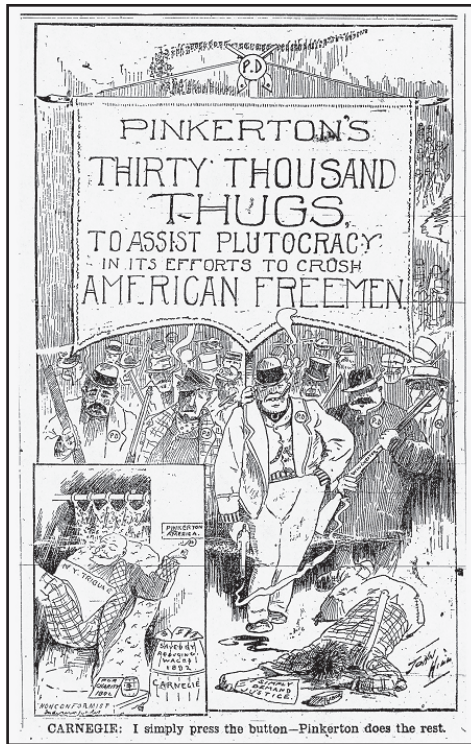


Figure 1: “CARNEGIE: I simply press the button—Pinkerton does the rest.” *Hutchinson Alliance Gazette*, August 4, 1892.

government actions could have as easily been portrayed as upholding order and defending property rights. This is so especially since Kansas Populists were property owners and entrepreneurs who could have been expected to be alarmed by lawlessness and collective interference with commercial activity. This point is particularly salient in light of the tactics of the Populist Movement. It did not engage in or advocate mass action. Populists did not seize grain elevators or storm banks or destroy railroad property despite identifying these institutions as the wellsprings of their financial ills (Farmer 1924; Hicks 1931; Goodwyn 1978; Miller, Worth Robert 1996; Cronon 1991; McNall 1988). Defending the strikers’ mass actions required the editors to give a unique interpretation to these events. They had to be refashioned so as to make them consistent

with the interests of entrepreneurial farmers. The labor theory of value was the vehicle for this refashioning.

Concern with government intervention on behalf of capital was a minor but important theme in the Homestead Strike. A July 21 editorial in the St. Francis *People's Defender* condemned the upcoming trial of strikers charged with murder as having a predetermined outcome since the union officials would be tried under and found guilty by "Carnegie gold-bought courts." It expressed the belief that

these men who had the courage to face the murderous fire of the Pinkerton's [*sic*] and contend for their rights will be sentenced for the murders for which Carnegie and Frick are alone responsible. But then who cares for innocent ones who must bear the blame. They are only common laborers—slaves of these modern times.

On July 22 an editorial in the Erie *Sentinel* castigated Carnegie management stating "the cold blooded cruelty which characterizes the methods taken by the Carnegie managers, in conjunction with the civil authorities to force these laborers to accept a reduction of wages has never been equaled in this country." On July 29 the Larned *Tiller and Toiler* asked "when will we be able to chronicle the fact that the state and national authority stands ready to protect labor against advances and encroachments of capital?"

Condemnation of the government's role drew the editors' ire more than any other aspect of the Pullman Strike. President Cleveland came in for particular scorn; he was pictured as little more than a lackey of the plutocrats. These editorials denounced the government in especially rich language. An editorial in the July 5 Garnett *Kansas Agitator* responded to President Cleveland's assertion that he deployed federal troops to assist corporations because the strike appeared to be the beginning of civil war with the opinion "in other words, the corporations are trying to FORCE A WAR, and Grover Cleveland, their dirty tool and lickspittle, is doing the bidding of his owners." On July 6 the Fredonia *Herald* compared the use the army to suppress the strikers to similar unjust use of military force in Europe.

Equally strident in its criticism of the President, editorials in the July 13 the *Salina Union* addressed the capitalists' hold on the government. One said "capitalists may feel safe behind the strong arm of the government, but they must remember that the people constitute the government and not Grover Cleveland." The other said "if bankers have got Uncle Sam by the leg, as Cleveland says, it looks as though the railroads have got him by the other limb. Nothing by a vigorous kick will release him from their clutches." Castigating the failure of the government to treat workers fairly, the St. Francis *People's Defender* said when forced to strike or starve, laborers always face "military powers and courts" that are "ready to do the bidding of corporations."

Framing the strikes terms of class struggle was another variation on the theme of interpreting events in light of the labor theory of value. The editors portrayed the strikes as a contest between plutocracy and the producer class. Their definition of the producer class was an inclusive one. It married the interests of farmers to the interests of workers. Victory by the strikers meant victory of the producer class. The rights of all producers to the wealth they created were at stake in these confrontations. As seen in the examples below, the editors framed the strikes in class terms and purposefully used the inclusive terms "we" and "the people" when advocating support for labor.

The depiction of the Homestead Strike in class terms was a recurrent theme in Populist newspapers. On June 25, the *Hays Free Press* published an editorial cartoon with the caption "American Slavery on the European Plan." It depicted bankers, congressmen, the plutocratic press, Wall Street, Gould, and others celebrating the enslaving of labor through the control of money, "a much more effective approach than the chattel slavery destroyed by the Civil War." The cartoon was published in the *Council Grove Courier* the same month.

On July 13 the *Kiowa Review* published a strident editorial, evoking class and revolutionary symbolism. It is worth quoting.

It is a warning to the people who have never thought of these things. Who can help seeing the general trend of affairs? Capital,

becoming arrogant from increasing power and pampered by our laws, demands the laborer must work for less wages, when he now has difficulty in keeping his family from starvation, and says he must either accept their terms or starve. And when labor, rendered desperate by continued wrong and seeing no help for its misery, appeals to capital to spare the wives and children, it is met by a band of organized mercenaries, the standing army of entrenched [*sic*] and fostered capital whose merciless depths of violence are protected by law. Is it a wonder that the great common people are becoming restless under the yoke of bondage more galling than slavery? The hand of Fate points to a revolution and it remains for capital to say, as it did in this local instance, whether it shall come by the bullet. There is a limit beyond which labor will not be driven and it is nearing that fatal time, being pressed harder all the time. The nation trembles for the result.

The July 15 edition of *Goodland Republic and Sherman County Farmer* featured a long editorial entitled “The Conflict Begins.” It raised the specter of a civil war between capital and labor. The consolidation and control of industry by monopoly capitalists was identified as the underlying cause of the coming strife. Condemning Carnegie, the editorial asserted that “the whole country is ringing with indignant protest against the doings of the cynical millionaire, anarchist and human monster, Carnegie.” It envisioned a social revolution to right the unequal relationship between capital and labor. On July 22, the editor predicted that the labor question would precipitate civil war.

The *Salina Union* employed class-conscious language on July 22 to clearly state its position. It stated that when, in time, common people do receive justice, “it will never be said of us that we arrayed ourselves against our own class or worked in the interest of their oppressors.” On August 11 the *Columbus Modern Light* published “Workingmen, Unite” an editorial essay that used Marx’s stirring call to arms to encourage laborers to see the lesson of Homestead and support the People’s Party.

Editorials depicting the strikes in class terms appeared less frequently during the Pullman Strike, but they were equally strident. On June 29 the *Larned Tiller and Toiler* cast the strike in sharp class

terms. It said “just as true as Christianity lives, the United States exists as an independent nation and the negro [sic] is no longer chattal [sic], just that sure will strife between plutocrat and labor end in victory for labor and right.” An editorial cartoon, “A Note of Warning,” was published by the Hutchinson *Alliance Gazette* on July 5 and by Fredonia *Alliance Herald* and the *Salina Union* on July 6 (see figure 2). It pictured a train driven by an American workman overrunning trusts, monopolists, and Wall Street. The train is embossed with the symbols for the ARU, the Knights of Labor, and the People’s Party. The *St. Francis People’s Defender* expressed the fear on July 12 that a defeat for the Pullman strikers “will be a death blow to independent labor and reduce laborers to a condition of serfdom worse than anything that has yet existed.”

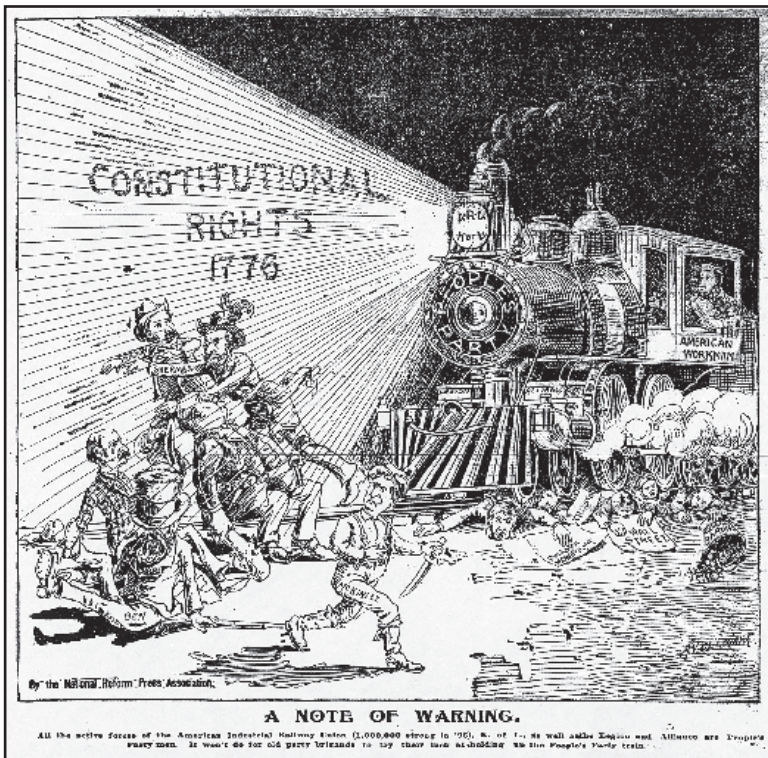


Figure 2: “A Note of Warning.” *The Fredonia Alliance Herald*, July 6, 1894.

The explicit analysis of the strikes through the lens of the labor theory of value was a recurrent theme in editorials on both strikes. As these pieces explicitly framed the strike in terms of the theory, they speak for themselves.

In a July 15 editorial entitled “The Homestead Matter,” the *Fredonia Alliance Herald* espoused the labor theory of value; it repeated this theme in on July 29. On July 28 the *Columbus Modern Light* published “An Object Lesson. The Very Existence of Capitalists Proves That Labor is Being Robbed.” This editorial essay argued that the events at Homestead provide the thoughtful person with “abundant justification for the most radical sentiments in the preamble to the Omaha Platform” including the platform’s “contention that the present industrial system is radically wrong and woefully unjust.” The essay then set forth the principles embodied in the labor theory of value and asserted that Carnegie’s “many millions rightfully belong to his locked-out workmen, who created them.” An accompanying editorial cartoon illustrated the article’s points. The *Kiowa Review* published the same editorial essay and cartoon on August 3.

The July 29 edition of the *Larned Tiller and Toiler* averred Jefferson and Lincoln rightly placed men above property and that “in this contest now going on in Pennsylvania, every lover of his race must take the side of the men and against the merciless tyranny of corporate greed. The contest may be long and painful in this country, but God’s children will beat that child of satan, [*sic*] known as the ‘corporation.’” An August 4 editorial in the *Garnett Agitator* claimed that producers, not Carnegie, Astor, Vanderbilt or Gould “make the world in all its splendor.”

The labor theory of value was applied to the Pullman Strike in much the same way it was to the Homestead Strike. On June 22, in response to a speech by a federal judge who “expressed a fear that there was a menace in the labor movement to civilization,” the *Goodland Republic* said it is a “curiously constructed mind that can see danger only in those organizations that are composed of the men and women who produce all the wealth; and it is still more curious that an intelligent man can read history and come to such a conclusion.” The editorial claimed that the masses were a force

for good in history and that the concentration of wealth has caused the decay of great civilizations. It asked if the judge would “have the masses live like cowardly cursed to be kicked and cuffed and robbed by the capitalistic combinations, without a remonstrance?” The *Republic* employed the stark imagery of slavery to condemn the theory of “free labor” the following week.

Before African slavery was abolished, the ‘owner of the nigger’ had to take care of the slave in case of sickness. He also had to provide food, shelter and clothing. He did it upon the same principle that the owner of the mule takes care of the mule. In the later days, however, the bosses who control labor—absolutely as southern masters owned their ‘niggers’—are not at all concerned about the health of their so-called ‘hired men.’

The August 2 edition of the *Barton Beacon* published “Capital and Labor,” an editorial essay that gave a detailed exposition of the labor theory of value. The day before the *St. Francis People’s Defender* pledged its support to the honest laborers in their struggle against “the most gigantic and despotic corporation that ever existed in any country. “[The workers] are in the right. They have created vast fortunes, and are entitled to a compensation that will permit them to live in comfort.” Every person who works for a living should support them and “assist them to win their battle against their oppressors, who would fain make them slave and serf, and deprive them of every right except to work at starvation wages.”

Discussion

This paper applies one aspect of Sewell’s theoretical framework of structure, duality, agency, and transformation to the historical situation of the Populist newspaper editors in Kansas. Specifically, it utilizes his axiom of the transposability of schemas to understand how these editors interpreted the violent confrontations between labor and capital as expressing the interest of entrepreneurial farmers who embraced the market economy just a few years prior to the strikes. Inherent in Sewell’s framework is a conceptualization that assists in understanding how a group applies new definitions

to changed environments so as generate programs and policies aimed at building coalitions to turn these definitions into practice. In a phrase, the group transposes schemas. That is to say, the group applies schemas that it learned in other contexts to the ones it currently faces and develops new explanations that make sense of an environment that has become hostile to its interests. These transposed schemas allow the group to make sense of the world and to generate strategies to change it so that it is less hostile.

This is precisely what the editors of the Populist newspapers in Kansas did. They saw—in many ways accurately—the extreme disadvantages the emerging industrial society was working on farmers. Monetary policy, railroad policies, and monopoly practices by grain elevator operators, combined with drought and falling prices, were threatening farmers' livelihood. The editors saw further that industrial workers were being disadvantaged by the same industrialization. The specific causes may have been different, but, in a larger sense, the transformation of the economy was producing incredible wealth that benefited neither workers nor farmers. Both groups were ensnared in a system that responded to the interests of capital at the expense of the "producer class." The editors transposed the schemas inherent in the labor theory of value to a situation barely anticipated in its origin. They extended the theory from the setting of a premodern society of small producers to encompass entrepreneurial farmers and mass-industry workers. In doing so, the Populist editors were part of a larger movement that was attempting to generate a political force sufficient to change the hostile environment their readers faced at the end of the nineteenth century.

Employing Sewell's framework also avoids the simplistic explanation of Populism given by social scientists and historians who define the movement as an expression of the status politics of a marginalized group. It allows us to see the internal logic of the Populist attempt to build a coalition with labor under the rubric of the producer class. Transposing the schemas of the labor theory of value to industrial strikes defined the struggles of workers as part of a larger struggle against monopolistic capital—a force that was distorting the meaning of the Republic. It provided a means for



Figure 3: “The Workingman Has Shaken the Two Old Parties for Good.”
St. Francis People’s Defender, October 18, 1894.

farmers to make common cause with workers in what otherwise might have appeared to be widely divergent and incompatible interests. An editorial cartoon, “The Workingman Has Shaken the Two Old Parties for Good,” published in the October 18, 1894 edition of the *St. Francis Defender* captures the editors’ intent as well as anything written here (see figure 3).

Appendix

Newspaper Sources

Newspapers reviewed, sorted by region, political affiliation, and, when not obvious from the title, city of publication are as follows:

Eastern region, Populist journals: *Erie Sentinel*; *Alliance Herald* (Fredonia); *Kansas Agitator* (Garnett); *Parsons Independent*; and *Modern Light* (Columbus). Republican journals: *Republican Record* (Erie); *Plaindealer* (Garnett); *Wilson County Citizen* (Fredonia); *Parsons Weekly Blade*; and *Columbus Advocate*.

Middle region, Populist journals: *Alliance Gazette* (Hutchinson); *Kiowa Review*; *Kiowa County Times* (Greensburg); *Salina Union*; *Barton Beacon* (Great Bend); *Council Grove Courier*. Republican journals: *Hutchinson News*; *Kiowa Journal*; *Weekly Republican* (Salina); *Republican Journal* (Salina); *Great Bend Tribune*; and *Council Grove Republican*.

Western region, Populist journals: *Free Press* (Hays); *Goodland Republic and Sherman County Farmer*; *Tiller and Toiler* (Larned); and *People's Defender* (St. Francis). Republican journals: *Republican* (Hays); *Goodland News* (Democratic newspaper); *Larned Weekly Chronoscope*; and *Cheyenne County Rustler* (St. Francis).

Different Populist newspapers were reviewed in Kiowa and Goodland. The *Kiowa Journal* was reviewed for the Homestead Strike and the *Kiowa County Times* for the Pullman Strike. The *Kiowa Journal* was published during both strikes but was unavailable during the research period, so the *Kiowa County Times* was substituted for it. The *Goodland Republic and Sherman County Farmer* went out of publication following the Homestead Strike so the *Goodland Republic* was used instead. The Hutchinson *Alliance Gazette* was a daily paper; all others were weekly. (Fortunately for the researcher — and for anyone interested in Kansas history — the Kansas State Historical Society has an extensive archive of state newspapers, many of which are complete or nearly complete. Without this valuable resource and the knowledgeable assistance of the Society's staff, this study would not have been possible.)

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