

**THE HISTORY CHANNEL® PRESENTS:
10 DAYS THAT UNEXPECTEDLY CHANGED AMERICA™**



The Homestead Strike
(JULY 6, 1892)

As the United States raced toward the 20th century, industrial and technological changes brought the transformation of the American workforce. During this period, the number of factory workers nearly tripled and new industries were powered workers who endured long hours and often low wages. An enterprising industrialist named Andrew Carnegie had capitalized on growing need for steel by opening a series of several massive new mills in the area near Pittsburgh. The most active of these high production factories was the Homestead Mill, a bustling factory and cornerstone of his empire. Trouble ensued at Homestead, however, when contract negotiations between the mill and the laborers union broke down in the summer of 1892. In response, Carnegie ordered the mill closed and vowed never to cooperate with the workers labor union. Quickly, Carnegie's business partner, coal magnate Henry Clay Frick, fortified the mill with a 10-foot-tall fence and a private army. On July 6, 1892, the striking workers and their families engaged 300 Pinkerton guards in a fierce 12-hour gun battle at the mill. After the chaos had settled, seven employees and three Pinkertons were killed, leaving the community stunned and devastated. This dramatic event, one of many labor disputes that had emerged in the U.S., signaled an on-going clash over wages and working conditions in a rapidly expanding manufacturing economy.

The Homestead Strike, a dramatic one hour documentary by filmmaker Rory Kennedy, is a powerful retelling of this showdown and its consequences for American society. With careful commentary by historians and captivating photos and reenactments, this special presentation is a moving depiction of the Homestead conflict and its implications for American labor relations. This documentary would be an excellent introduction to the historical development of American industry. It would be a great contribution to course units and lesson plans covering the turn of the 20th century, a

useful precursor to units on Progressivism and Theodore Roosevelt, and a key lesson on the consequences which followed from the growth of the American economy

Curriculum Links:

The Homestead Strike would be useful for American History, American Culture, Ethics, and Science and Technology courses. It is appropriate for middle school and high school students. It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions, (2) Conflict and cooperation, and (3) Patterns of social and political interaction.

Key Terms:

“Scab”

Amalgamated

Boom and bust

Capitulate

Industrialist

Manifest Destiny

Permeate

Union

Unprecedented

Comprehension Questions:

1. *Describe the working conditions at the Homestead Works once Andrew Carnegie took it over. Do you feel that these conditions were fair to the workers?*
2. *For many workers, unions were the only means they had to get their concerns and voices heard. Describe the role of unions in the late 1800s.*
3. *Andrew Carnegie felt no responsibility to workers and wanted to get rid of the unions in his facilities. Yet, workers felt an ownership toward their jobs. What impact did these opposing views have on society?*
4. *In 1892, Henry Clay Frick, working on behalf of Andrew Carnegie, created a lock out at the Homestead steel plant. Employees could not keep their jobs unless they quit the union. Was this an effective strategy for instigating change? Why or why not?*
5. *This documentary makes frequent mention of “public opinion.” How do you think public opinion was measured in the 1890s? How are they measured today?*
6. *Frick hired the Pinkerton Security Agency to come to Homestead by boat to secure the property so that he could bring in “scabs” to do the work of the union steelworkers who were locked out. The Pinkertons were met with resistance and were beaten by the striking workers. Public opinion about the incident was mixed. Why? Which side would you have supported and why?*
7. *How were Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick alike? How were they different?*
8. *On July 12, 1892, the governor of Pennsylvania sent in militia to secure Homestead, and within a week it was up and running without union workers. Strikers were welcome back, but none return. Negotiations continued in the fall. Many strikers could not hold out any more, and in November, they voted to go*

- back to work. Frick sent a telegraph to Carnegie which read, "Victory early." Was this a victory? Why or why not?*
- 9. Do you think labor and working conditions are still major issues in American culture? Discuss.*
 - 10. How did the Homestead Strike change American history?*

Extended Activities:

1. Many different perspectives on the Homestead strike are presented in this documentary: workers, industrialists, and the American public. Chose one of these perspectives and write a letter to the editor taking a position on the strike after it had started. Share these letters with the larger class or group.
2. After watching this documentary, review the positions of the labor union and Carnegie and Frick during the Homestead strike. Then, write up two documents. In one document, write up strike demands from the perspective of striking workers. In the other, compose a response as if you were Carnegie and Frick. Make sure to consider the arguments and decisions outlined in this documentary.
3. In one page or less, write up a short newspaper piece or essay describing the Homestead strike and its significance in American history. Share your ideas with your larger class or group and discuss its implications for American industrial and labor relations.

Primary Source Exploration:

This documentary quotes a cable sent from Andrew Carnegie to Henry Clay Frick at the height of the strike. After reading this telegram, ask students to respond to the quote below.

"All anxiety gone since you stand firm. Never employ one of those rioters. Let grass grow over the works. Must not fail now."- Andrew Carnegie to Henry Clay Frick

1. *What do you think was the primary message of Carnegie's telegram to Frick? Given their relationship, do you think it would have been possible for Frick to oppose Carnegie? Discuss.*
2. Why do you think Carnegie would have been willing to "let grass grow over the works" rather than bargain with workers?

Resources:

Books

Carnegie, Andrew. *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie*, (Northeastern University Press, 1986).

Hakim, Joy. *History of US Book #8: An Age of Extremes*, (Oxford, 2002).

Lichtenstein, Nelson, et al. *Who Built America?: From 1877 to Present, Vol. 2*, (Worth, 2000).

Whitelaw, Nancy. *Homestead Steel Strike of 1892*, (Morgan Reynolds, 2006).

Web sites

A useful lesson plan with background info and ideas:

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=430

A helpful narrative of the strike and its aftermath:

<http://projects.vassar.edu/1896/strikes.html>

Songs inspired by the Homestead strike:

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5322/>