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Perceptions of Violence on the Wageworkers' Frontier*

An American-Canadian Comparison

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During its 35 years as part of the wage-workers' frontier (1885-1920), the Pacific Northwest experienced five episodes of labor-related violence that have been the subject of considerable popular and scholarly writing, invariably rating a mention in regional history texts. These episodes include anti-Chinese riots by organized labor in Puget Sound ports and Cascade coal towns, 1885-86; violent protests by organized labor in Idaho's Coeur d'Alene mining district in 1892 and again in 1899; the Everett massacre of 1916; and the Centralia massacre of 1919, which collectively account for the loss of approximately 30 lives and somewhat less than half a million dollars in property damage (see table 1). The Everett massacre resulted in the greatest loss of life, and Idaho's 1899 mining war the greatest loss of property.[1]

A rough quantification of articles published by four major Pacific Northwest history journals from 1960 to 1983 reveals that out of a total of nearly 80 labor-oriented essays, roughly half focused on strikes and violence—especially violence. In view of this emphasis, one might be tempted to conclude that the five major episodes of labor-related violence in the region were substantively worse than incidents that occurred in industrialized portions of the East or Mid-

TABLE 1

MAJOR EPISODES OF LABOR-RELATED VIOLENCE
Pacific Northwest, 1885-1919

	Lives Lost	Property Destroyed
Anti-Chinese Agitation, 1885-86[a]	4-6	Tacoma's Chinese quarter later burned
Coeur d'Alene Mining War, 1892[b]	6	Idle ore concentrator destroyed in Gem
Coeur d'Alene Mining War, 1899[c]	2	$250,000 Bunker Hill concentrator destroyed
Everett Massacre, 1916[d]	12*	minimal
Centralia Massacre, 1919[e]	5	IWW hall vandalized

SOURCES: [a]James A. Halseth and Bruce A. Glasrud, "Anti-Chinese Movements in Washington, 1885-1886: A Reconsideration," in The Northwest Mosaic: Minority Conflicts in Pacific Northwest History, ed. Halseth and Glasrud (Boulder, 1977), 116-39; Jules A. Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle, 1885-1886," PNQ, Vol. 39 (1948), 103-30, and "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma, 1885," PHR, Vol. 23 (1954), 271-83; Carlos A. Schwantes, "Protest in a Promised Land: Unemployment, Disinheritance, and the Origin of Labor Militancy in the Pacific Northwest, 1885-1886," Western Historical Quarterly, Vol. 13 (1982), 373-90; Robert E. Wynne, Reaction to the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, 1850 to 1910 (New York, 1978).
[b]Earl Clark, "Shoot-Out in Burke Canyon," American Heritage, Vol. 22 (August 1971), 44-48, 96-97; Mary Hallock Foote, Coeur d'Alene (Boston, 1894); William J. Gaboury, "From Statehouse to Bull Pen: Idaho Populism and the Coeur d'Alene Troubles of the 1890's," PNQ, Vol. 58 (1967), 14-22; Stanley Stewart Phipps, "From Bull Pen to Bargaining Table: The Tumultuous Struggle of the Coeur d'Alenes Miners for the Right to Organize, 1887-1942," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Idaho, 1983); Robert Wayne Smith, The Coeur d'Alene Mining War of 1892: A Case Study of an Industrial Dispute (Corvallis, 1961).
[c]Job Harriman, The Class War in Idaho: The Horrors of the Bull Pen, 3d ed. (New York, 1900); May Arkwright Hutton, The Coeur d'Alenes; or, A Tale of the Modern Inquisition in Idaho (Wallace, Idaho, 1900); Coeur d'Alene Labor Troubles, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., 1900, H.R. 1999 (Serial 4027); Coeur d'Alene Mining Troubles, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., 1899, S.D. 25 (Serial 3846).
[d]Norman H. Clark, "Everett, 1916, and After," PNQ, Vol. 57 (1966), 57-64; idem, Mill Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington, from Its Earliest Beginnings on the Shores of Puget Sound to the Tragic and Infamous Event Known as the Everett Massacre (Seattle, 1970); Walker C. Smith, The Everett Massacre: A History of the Class Struggle in the Lumber Industry (Chicago, [1918?]); William J. Williams, "Bloody Sunday Revisited," PNQ, Vol. 71 (1980), 50-62.
[e]Ralph Chaplin, The Centralia Conspiracy: The Truth about the Armistice Day Tragedy (Chicago, 1924); Albert F. Gunns, "Ray Becker, the Last Centralia Prisoner," PNQ, Vol. 59 (1968), 88-99; John M. McClelland, Jr., "Terror on Tower Avenue," PNQ, Vol. 57 (1966), 65-72; Donald A. McPhee, "The Centralia Incident and the Pamphleteers," PNQ, Vol. 62 (1971), 110-16; Walker C. Smith, Was It Murder? The Truth about Centralia, rev. ed. (Seattle, 1927).
*Exact number of deaths not known.

west, or that labor-related violence in general—not just the notorious episodes—was more common on the wageworkers' frontier than elsewhere.[2]

Between 1877 and 1937, the United States as a whole suffered through what could be labeled an age of industrial violence. These were the years of the Homestead strike and the Memorial Day massacre. Seen in this context, with loss of life and property as a basis for comparison, the five major episodes of labor-related violence on the Pacific Northwest wageworkers' frontier appear no more severe than similar episodes elsewhere (see table 2). Further work remains to be done

TABLE 2

MAJOR EPISODES OF LABOR-RELATED VIOLENCE
United States, 1877-1937

	Lives Lost	Property Destroyed (in millions)
Railway Strike, 1877 (Pittsburgh Riot)	26	$5-10
Haymarket Riot, 1886	7	—
Homestead Strike, 1892	7	—
Memorial Day Massacre, 1937	10	—

SOURCES: Philip Taft and Philip Ross, "American Labor Violence: Its Causes, Character, and Outcome," in *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr (Beverly Hills, 1979), 187-241 *passim*; and Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History*, updated and revised (New York, 1965).

to make meaningful regional comparisons of the total number of labor-related disputes resulting in loss of life and/or property.[3]

A somewhat different perspective emerges if loss of life in these episodes is expressed in terms of deaths per 100,000 people. The sparsely settled West shows a much higher death rate than the East (see table 3). Despite the higher death rate in lightly populated places like Idaho, however, it remains obvious that

statistics alone cannot explain the emphasis on violent aspects of the wageworkers' frontier. What is it, then, about labor-related violence in the West that generated widespread interest among contemporaries and continues to do so among scholars and popularizers today?

Five plausible though somewhat overlapping answers come to mind. There may be others, but these seem to address the question most directly:

First, episodes of labor-related violence frequently engendered political and legal consequences extending far beyond the immediate parties and issues involved in a dispute. The 1892 mining war in the Coeur d'Alenes, for example, influenced the thinking of populists in both Idaho and neighboring Washington, sent reverberations through state and federal governments, and led to formation of the Western Federation of Miners.[4]

The importance of an episode of labor-related violence, in short, lies in neither bloodshed nor property loss but in the larger impact on the state, region, or nation. Such an episode, moreover, inevitably possesses an ideological component and usually demands an explanation—a justification for the use of violence, a rationale for its suppression by authorities, or an explanation for why it occurred in the first place.

A second and closely related explanation for the interest that episodes of western labor-oriented violence have aroused historically is that contemporary witnesses had a variety of reasons to exaggerate and twist the facts, especially the polemicists for and against organized labor; and some journalists—either knowingly or not—fostered and perpetuated the distortion in order to sell stories and newspapers. Events in the Coeur d'Alene mining dispute of 1892 illustrate the process. Robert Wayne Smith in his study of the episode notes how the Spokane *Review*, a newspaper friendly to mine owners, reported a massacre of strikebreakers by union members at the steamboat landing at the Cataldo Mission. According to the *Review*, unionized miners committed atrocities on the fleeing and unarmed scabs. John Monahan, superin-

tendent of the Gem mine, was reported killed, though he appeared in Spokane a few days later bearing scarcely a scratch. The facts as revealed by later investigation are that no one was killed or even

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* The main attributes of the wageworkers' frontier, which existed in various parts of the West from the 1850s until the early 1920s, can be summarized as follows: its labor force was predominantly male, manual, and mobile, typically youthful and unmarried, and employed in one of the region's extractive industries. A good many of its members also appear to have believed that workers in the West were a breed apart from those in the industrial East. They possessed an attitude that might be labeled a sense of western advantage. Like all frontiers, it was defined by a combination of geographic circumstances, the process of evolving from simple to more complex forms of social and economic organization, and the way its inhabitants perceived their changing world. For an extended discussion, see Carlos A. Schwantes, "The Concept of the Wageworkers' Frontier: A Framework for Future Research on Labor in the American West," paper prepared for Walter Nugent's NEH Summer Seminar, Indiana University, 1984, and forthcoming in *Western Historical Quarterly*.

1. Labor-related violence encompasses all violent episodes specifically involving workers and includes elements of the familiar categories of antiradical, racial, and industrial (or labor) violence. For examples of the familiar categories, see Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, eds., *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York, 1970).

2. The labor-oriented essays were distributed as follows: *PNQ*, 42; *OHQ*, 5; *Idaho Yesterdays*, 18; and *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*, 12. Carlos A. Schwantes, "The History of Pacific Northwest Labor History," *Idaho Yesterdays*, Vol. 28 (Winter 1985), 23-35.

3. Graham Adams, Jr., *Age of Industrial Violence, 1910-15* (New York, 1966); Philip Taft and Philip Ross, "American Labor Violence: Its Causes, Character, and Outcome," in *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, rev. ed. (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1979), 187-241 *passim*.

4. William J. Gaboury, "From Statehouse to Bull Pen: Idaho Populism and the Coeur d'Alene Troubles of the 1890's," *PNQ*, Vol. 58 (1967), 14-22; Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Seattle, 1979), 53; Robert Wayne Smith, *The Coeur d'Alene Mining War of 1892: A Case Study of an Industrial Dispute*, [2d ed.] (Gloucester, Mass., 1968), 106-109.

TABLE 3

LIVES LOST IN LABOR-RELATED VIOLENCE
Per 100,000 People

	Location	Death Rate
Railway Strike, 1877 (Pittsburgh Riot)	Pennsylvania	0.61
Anti-Chinese Agitation, 1885-86 Puget Sound	Washington	1.68
Haymarket Riot, 1886	Illinois	0.18
Coeur d'Alene Mining War, 1892	Idaho	6.74
Homestead Strike, 1892	Pennsylvania	0.13
Coeur d'Alene Mining War, 1899	Idaho	1.23
Everett Massacre, 1916	Washington	0.88
Centralia Massacre, 1919	Washington	0.37
Memorial Day Massacre, 1937	Illinois	0.13

SOURCES: Figures are calculated using information contained in Tables 1 and 2 and the state or territorial population recorded in the decennial federal census dated nearest each episode.

wounded at the mission landing, although a gang of desperadoes whose identity remains unknown did rob the defenseless strikebreakers.

The importance of the mission incident, notes Smith, "lies in the publicity it received and the public reaction to the reports. The atrocity stories in the *Review* were copied all through the Northwest." The popular reaction was damaging to organized labor and certainly helped to legitimate state and federal intervention to halt the supposed bloodshed.[5]

Similarly, Joseph R. Conlin and other historians have recorded how enemies of the Industrial Workers of the World imputed to that organization an undeserved reputation for violence. In this way anti-radical forces justified their attacks on Wobblies during the World War I era.[6]

Another source of the continuing interest in the West's labor-related violence is local and regional chroniclers. Treating history as little more than past politics and prominent personalities, they emphasized violent episodes in their subscription histories, much as Sunday-supplement writers later recognized and retold an exciting story when they saw one. Typical was George Fuller, a Spokane librarian who wrote in his four-vol-

ume subscription history of the interior Northwest: "The labor riots in the Coeur d'Alênes, culminating in the blowing-up of mines, martial law and the famous Bull Pen, with the assassination of Governor Steunenberg and the disclosures of Harry Orchard as a sequel, form a thrilling chapter in the history of the mining region." For Stewart Holbrook, several such "thrilling" chapters formed the basis for his exaggerated account, *The Rocky Mountain Revolution* (1956). In this way a body of folk knowledge was created with which professional historians have had to contend.[7]

Perhaps Walter Prescott Webb was at least partially right when he speculated that the states of the arid West were forced to make "thick" history from "thin" materials. "Westerners have developed a talent for taking something small and blowing it up to giant size, as a photographer blows up a photograph. They write of cowboys as if they were noble knights, and the cowmen kings." Although Webb's judgments are arguable, tales of the 1890s mining wars must have made rousing history for people in the young state of Idaho, just as accounts of Revolutionary and Civil War conflict did in older states like North Carolina or Georgia.[8]

In his 1985 study, *The Fatal Environment*, Richard Slotkin suggests a variant on this theme when he observes that conservative journalists in 1877 metaphorically equated the railway strikers and Chief Joseph's Indians, both being "savages" who posed a clear and unambiguous threat to society. This thought-provoking line of inquiry should prompt researchers to probe anew the literature of labor-related violence on the wage-workers' frontier in an effort to understand what it symbolized to Americans at that time.[9]

Fourth, as Slotkin makes clear, discussions of historical emphasis seem inevitably to raise the issue of culture—those shared values that influence all that people think and do. The role of culture, both regional and national, can be seen clearly by comparing American and Canadian perceptions of the incidence of violence in the two countries. It is well documented that Americans tend to exaggerate violent aspects of their nation's history, and Canadians the peaceable ones of theirs. The reason for that difference at first seems obvious: Canadians have simply had a less violent past than their neighbors. Written and oral records indicate that the Canadian frontier, in

5. Smith, 71-77 (73, quotation).

6. Joseph R. Conlin, "The IWW and the Question of Violence," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 51 (1968), 316-26 *passim*; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago, 1969), 160-64; Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, Oreg., 1967), 60-61.

7. George W. Fuller, *The Inland Empire of the Pacific Northwest: A History*, 4 vols. (Spokane, 1928), III, 72; another example is N. W. Durham's chapter on the "fierce labor riots" in the Coeur d'Alenes in his *History of the City of Spokane and Spokane Country, Washington: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, 3 vols. (Spokane, 1912), I, 443 ff.

8. Walter Prescott Webb, "The American West: Perpetual Mirage," *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 214 (May 1957), 25-31.

9. Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York, 1985).

particular was much more peaceable than the American.[10]

British Columbia, for example, experienced no vigilantism, and in the only episode of lynching (1884), a group of some 80 men from neighboring Washington Territory took a murderer from a British Columbia jail and hanged him near the border (unfortunately for Canadian sensibilities, on the British Columbia side). Canadian historians writing about the incident note crisply, "All the factors, except the scene of the lynching, belonged to the United States." By way of comparison, Richard Maxwell Brown lists six episodes of vigilantism for Washington, five for Idaho, and six for Montana. The Canadian journalist Pierre Berton in his history of the Klondike rush contrasts the violence of the American town Skagway and the peaceableness of its Canadian counterpart, Dawson City.[11]

To account for the apparent national differences, one might point out that frontier government and law enforcement agencies were more effective in British Columbia and the Yukon than in Washington, Idaho, and Montana; and that post–Civil War Southerners, seemingly the most violence-prone element of the American West, were generally absent from the Canadian mining camps. Berton attributes the difference to Canadian gun control and other laws and the presence of the Mounties, and Bancroft in similar fashion asserts that the British Columbia judge Matthew Baillie Begbie was "almost as good as a vigilance committee . . . ofttimes even better. There were in his rulings the intensity and directness which render popular tribunals so terrible to evil-doers without the heat and passion almost always inseparable from illegal demonstrations."[12]

In addition to Begbie, British Columbia had a government-funded system of gold commissioners, who possessed the power to settle disputed mining claims and to guarantee public safety, and gold escorts, who provided security for shipments of precious metal. There was a trade-off, though, at least in the eyes of individualistic Americans. Revealing his cultural biases, Bancroft compared the early system of government on Vancouver Island to that in Washington Territory

and concluded that "if there was too little governing south of the 49th parallel, north of that line there was now altogether too much," for the "poor settler" lived under the "most arbitrary and insane restrictions that ever emanated from a free government favoring free colonization." Moreover, pioneer British Columbians and Canadians were willing to shoulder a much heavier per capita tax burden than were Americans in order to maintain their highly effective system of frontier law and order.[13]

As a result of its official emphasis on "peace, order, and good government" and not "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Canada maintained its image as a peaceable kingdom, but was it really so peaceable in fact? Kenneth McNaught, a history professor at the University of Toronto, thinks not. He documents well Canadians' tendency to deemphasize the violent aspects of their history—"Practically all of our textbooks in history, political science and sociology assume that Canada has been and remains a non-violent society"—and argues that Canadians "have engaged in every kind of violence and from every kind of motive."

Canada's junior-grade manifest destiny . . . offers several instructive examples of the epidemic distortions in Canadian-American comparisons. While it is more than evident that violence pervaded every phase of westward development, no one can mistake the thrust of our general historical interpretation: the two [Riel] rebellions were largely abortive and proved the efficacy of Canadian insistence on maintaining law and order; we had no substantial Indian warfare or vigilante tradition for much the same reason. In the West, as elsewhere, change came not as a result of violence, but as a consequence of political debate followed by legislative and executive action. Violence was not a function of the political system but an aberration quickly corrected.[14]

Certainly, the Canadian wageworkers' frontier was not exempt from labor-related violence. During the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees strike in 1903, Canadian Pacific constables killed a picketing worker in Vancouver, giving British Columbia its first labor martyr; in 1907 organized labor in Vancouver rioted against the growing presence of immigrant Japanese workers; and violence erupted during a lengthy strike by Van-

couver Island coal miners (1912-14). It remains a wonder, however, that in British Columbia—a province noted for the militance of organized labor—so many strikes produced so little serious violence.[15]

10. George F. G. Stanley, "Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis," in *Canadian Historical Association Report of the Annual Meeting* (1940), 111. A good example of the perceptual emphasis is William Kilbourn, ed., *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom* (New York, 1971). Sometimes overlooked, even by Americans, are observations such as that made in the late 1870s by a Britisher, Wallis Nash, that "even in the wildest part the State's writ runs" (*Oregon, There and Back in 1877* [London, 1878], 207). See also W. Eugene Hollon, *Frontier Violence: Another Look* (New York, 1974), 194-216 *passim.*

11. F. W. Howay, W. N. Sage, and H. F. Angus, *British Columbia and the United States: The North Pacific Slope from Fur Trade to Aviation* (Toronto, 1942), 168; Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York, 1975), 308-309, 313, 318; Pierre Berton, *Klondike Fever: The Life and Death of the Last Great Gold Rush* (New York, 1958), 318-32 ff.

12. Richard Maxwell Brown, "Southern Violence—Regional Problem or National Nemesis? Legal Attitudes toward Southern Homicide in Historical Perspective," *Vanderbilt Law Review,* Vol. 32 (1979), 225-50; Berton, 318-19; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of British Columbia, 1792-1887* (San Francisco, 1887), 430-31.

13. Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto, 1958), 180, 188; Bancroft, 310-11; William J. Trimble, *The Mining Advance into the Inland Empire,* Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin No. 638, History Series Vol. 3, No. 2 (Madison, 1914), 196, 197, 202. In a similar vein Albert D. Richardson observed, "If anyone doubts that the world is governed too much, let him study the parliament of this little island [Vancouver], which sits ten months in the year!" *Beyond the Mississippi: From the Great River to the Great Ocean* (New York, 1867; rpt. [1968]), 416-17.

14. Kenneth McNaught, "Collective Violence in Canadian History: Some Problems of Definition and Research," Workshop in Violence in Canadian Society, Center of Criminology, University of Toronto, Sept. 8 and 9, 1975, pp. 165-76 (169, textbooks, motive); and *idem,* "Violence in Canadian History," in *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton,* ed. John S. Moir (Toronto, 1970), 66-84 (77, manifest).

15. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage,* 146, 157-59, 203-205; Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater:*

One reason is that on several occasions troops were hastily called out to keep the peace even before it could be broken. Another is that Canadians, believing violence to be an undesirable American trait, were highly embarrassed by such displays. When a series of minor disorders erupted in a West Kootenay mining town, a British Columbia newspaper wondered aloud whether Kaslo was a "disgraceful exception to the good order prevalent in British Columbia." In this and several other instances, Canadians rightly or wrongly blamed Americans for causing the labor-related violence.[16]

The point is not that Canadians were more violent than is commonly thought; rather, by deemphasizing violent aspects of their nation's past and occasionally resorting to heavy-handed and expensive means of keeping the peace, they reveal their cultural biases and define a component of their Canadianism, even as Americans betray a fascination for certain symbols of violence—the gunslinger and the vigilante, for example—and seem to regard them as perfectly acceptable components of a robust, two-fisted strain of Americanism. The resulting national differences are perhaps similar to the enlarged or diminished images two people would see if they viewed a violent event from opposite ends of a telescope.[17]

Fifth, and finally, a perceptual matter closely related to emphasis is that of the rightness (or legitimacy) of violent action. U.S. history contains many examples of violence apparently encouraged and legitimated by the values Americans hold dear: individualism and grass-roots democracy; a higher law that justifies extralegal, but seemingly necessary, action; and sympathy for the underdog, who, win or lose, refuses to cringe before a powerful opponent. In addition, a person's sense of the past can either inhibit or legitimate the use of violence, or at least contribute to its glorification.[18]

Americans have a heritage of violence officially sanctioned by their own successful Revolution. Canadians, on the other hand, for a variety of reasons—not the least of which is that some of their forebears were victims of the American Revolution—have generally been uncomfortable with manifestations of violence. One result of their unease is that any tendency to glorify violence has been inhibited by a regional and national history lacking models of "legitimate" violence. The opposite is true in the U.S., though this is not to say that Americans have enthusiastically embraced all forms of violence. During the anti-Chinese agitation of the mid-1880s, some Washington residents were fearful that violent displays might set back the territory's chances of becoming a state. But working-class agitators found ample justification in history for their illegal banishment of the Chinese.[19]

Even in the early 20th century, the American wageworkers' frontier occasionally spawned violence of the type popularly associated with the frontier of the classic West. Lynching, for instance, embodied the notion that under certain circumstances extralegal violence was a legitimate exercise of popular will. Of one lynching a rural Washington newspaper editorialized in 1905: "Lynching is wrong; but necessity makes it right," asserted the *Okanogan Record*. "Judges may juggle with justice but when Judge Lynch closes the docket the verdict is writ so that all may read."[20]

At that time lynching was of course a nationwide phenomenon, but examples of western lynchings involving labor appear to be closely tied to the classic frontier both in fact and in fiction. When the crippled Wobbly leader Frank Little was lynched in Butte in 1917, his killers affixed a placard to his neck reading "Last Warning. 3-7-77." The numbers refer to the dimensions of a grave, and the message was identical to that left by the Virginia City, Montana, vigilantes of the 1860s. The novelist Zane Grey, in a strangely atavistic and melodramatic novel about Wobblies during World War I, *The Desert of Wheat* (1919), has angry ranchers hang a Wobbly organizer as a patriotic gesture and suspend that familiar cryptic warning around his neck.[21]

In a similar throwback to the classic frontier, M. C. Sullivan, the head of a Portland private detective agency, brought a western gunslinger mentality to the complex new business of labor relations. For a fee, he and his operatives would infiltrate the region's newly organized labor unions, intimidate employees, and sup-

A Century of Labour in British Columbia (Vancouver, B.C., 1967), 40, 55, 58, 59, 80. During the years 1901-1905, for example, strikes in Canada affected 123,096 workers and resulted in a loss of 2,461,999 workdays. British Columbia alone accounted for 25 percent of all strikers and 32 percent of all lost workdays: Canada, Department of Labour, *Report on Strikes and Lockouts in Canada from 1901 to 1912* (Ottawa, 1913), 25, 72.

16. Peter Guy Silverman, "Military Aid to Civil Power in British Columbia: The Labor Strikes at Wellington and Steveston, 1890, 1900," *PNQ*, Vol. 61 (1970), 156-61; Nelson (B.C.) *Miner*, Feb. 11, 1893; Robert E. Wynne, "American Labor Leaders and the Vancouver Anti-Oriental Riot," *PNQ*, Vol. 57 (1966), 172-79; Howard H. Sugimoto, "The Vancouver Riot and Its International Significance," *PNQ*, Vol. 64 (1973), 163-74. Promoters of British Columbia presented peaceableness as a major attraction to prospective settlers: "The mining camps of British Columbia are as orderly as English villages," asserted the *Guide to the Province of British Columbia for 1877-8* (Victoria, 1877), 45.

17. A classic example of this fascination is the abundance of articles, books, and movies about Billy the Kid: Hollon, 189-90.

18. Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage* (New York, 1966), 157, 219-35 *passim*.

19. James Truslow Adams, "Our Lawless Heritage," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 142 (December 1928), 732-40; Carlos A. Schwantes, "Protest in a Promised Land: Unemployment, Disinheritance, and the Origin of Labor Militancy in the Pacific Northwest, 1885-1886," *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 13 (1982), 375.

20. The term "classic West" is used by Richard Maxwell Brown to refer to "the pioneer West or the Old West, with its distinctive mythology focusing on mountain men, cowboys, Indians, prospectors, gunfighters, and outlaws"; the counterclassic West is "urbanized, industrialized, and modernized." See Brown's essay "The New Regionalism in America, 1970-1981," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. William G. Robbins, Robert J. Frank, and Richard E. Ross (Corvallis, 1983), 37-96 (71, quotation). *Okanogan Record* (Conconully), April 28, 1905. By contrast, a conservative B.C. newspaper editorialized that the frequency of lynchings in the U.S. "shows that not only is the government much weaker than that of a civilized country ought to be, but that the moral state of the people is in a dangerously low condition"; *Daily Colonist* (Victoria), July 29, 1893.

21. Zane Grey, *The Desert of Wheat* (New York, 1919), 246.

ply their corporate masters with private armies. Sullivan was especially proud of the time in 1891 when he helped to lure unsuspecting blacks from the Midwest to the coal mines east of Seattle and, under the watchful eyes of his troops, pressed them into service as strikebreakers. "Where is your authority, Mr. Sullivan, for bringing an armed body of men into this country?" a Seattle newspaperman had asked. "Carry it in my vest pocket, sir," was the detective's casual reply; "It only requires a little nerve and a pat hand, and the grit to stand by it and this little thing [a gun] in your vest pocket." Sullivan's reply was perhaps a reflection of the fact that earlier in his career he had driven a stagecoach in Nevada and generally bullied his way through life by displaying individual courage and bravado, swaggering in the classic manner popularly attributed to western males.[22]

Idaho's recent frontier past may well have played a role in the 1890s violence in the Coeur d'Alenes, conditioning workers to think that certain forms of violence used for the supposed good of the community were legitimate—such as ridding it of scabs. Before trouble erupted in that mining region, Idaho had already experienced several well-publicized episodes of vigilantism, and as was often the case in such episodes, many of the community's prominent people participated in or headed the vigilance movements. The "best people" taking a leading role in violence also characterized Tacoma's 1885 expulsion

of the Chinese. Chief among the Sinophobes were the city's mayor, two of its councilmen, a probate judge, and a prominent newspaperman.[23]

Viewed from yet another perspective, workers who committed acts of violence in Idaho's two mining wars acted somewhat in the fashion of the social bandits that Richard White mentions in his study of outlaw gangs of the Middle Border: union miners violated the law to rid the region of scabs but, in the eyes of many community members, seemed to serve a higher good. Quite likely the union miners would have gone unpunished had it not been for the interference of authorities from outside the mining district.[24]

One can tentatively conclude from this brief overview that loss of life and property in major episodes of labor-related violence on the wageworkers' frontier was not significantly greater in the Pacific Northwest than in the older, urban-industrial parts of the U.S. But western Americans, far more than their Canadian counterparts, accepted the legitimacy of certain forms of violence, and that has resulted in a tendency to magnify violence and thus influence the perceptions of posterity. This emphasis made the American wageworkers' frontier appear more violent than it was in fact.

On the other hand, the five major episodes discussed here cannot be dismissed as being completely overrated. After all, perception of violence is not

simply a passive matter. Perceptions can easily contribute to violence, such as that perpetrated by antiradical vigilance groups and government officials bent on destroying the perceived Wobbly threat. Violence and perceptions of violence feed on one another, especially when history and culture glorify and legitimate violent outbursts. Considering the circumstances, perhaps the real issue awaiting future research is why the wageworkers' frontier was not far more violent than it actually was. □

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22. Tacoma *Daily News*, April 5, 1894; Seattle *Press-Times*, May 19, 1891; Robert A. Campbell, "Blacks and the Coal Mines of Western Washington, 1888-1896," *PNQ*, Vol. 73 (1982), 146-55.

23. Lengthy descriptions of the vigilantism are found in W. J. McConnell, *Early History of Idaho* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1913). McConnell, who headed the vigilantes in one celebrated episode, later served Idaho as U.S. senator (1890) and governor (1893-97). Murray Morgan, *Puget's Sound: A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound* (Seattle, 1979), 212-52 *passim*.

24. Richard White, "Outlaw Gangs of the Middle Border: American Social Bandits," *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (1981), 387-408.