



The Western History Association

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Source: *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oct., 1982), pp. 373-390

Published by: [Western Historical Quarterly, Utah State University](#) on behalf of [The Western History Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/968690>

Accessed: 28/04/2013 00:19

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Protest in a Promised Land: Unemployment, Disinheritance, and the Origin of Labor Militancy in the Pacific Northwest, 1885-1886

CARLOS A. SCHWANTES

Confrontation and violence loom large in the histories of the North Pacific industrial frontier. Seattle's general strike, bloodlettings in Everett and Centralia, and shoot-outs in the silver camps of northern Idaho constitute a major part of the region's folklore. And these are only the best-known examples in a lengthy list of protracted strikes, lock-outs, dynamite blasts, and broken heads and bodies. Any time resolute lumberjacks, sawyers, and coal and metal miners confronted equally determined employers, they risked violence. Because both entrepreneurs and workers on the North Pacific industrial frontier asserted the right of the individual to control his own destiny, struggles over such bread-and-butter issues as wages and hours frequently escalated into bitter contests to determine how much power workers would retain over their lives. Some might argue that the region's industrial conflict was rooted in the class consciousness of its workers, particularly those living in isolated lumber and mining communities. But there is an alternative, non-Marxian explanation for labor's militance. It is the ideology of disinheritance, first popularized during the unrest of the mid-1880s. This ideology not only explains the broad appeal of several protest movements, such as the Populist revolt that united farmers and workers in the 1890s, but also suggests why so many professed radicals eventually moved into the region's political and economic mainstream.¹

The events of one episode in particular—the anti-Chinese crusade that erupted during the hard times of the mid-1880s—initiated and

Carlos A. Schwantes is professor of history, Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington. The idea of the ideology of disinheritance had its genesis in Richard Maxwell Brown's NEH-sponsored summer seminar on violence in America, held in Eugene, Oregon, in 1980.

¹ An important essay emphasizing the supposed class consciousness of Pacific Northwest metal miners is Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1890-1905," *Labor History*, 7 (Spring 1966), 131-54.

legitimated the militant stance that became a hallmark of organized workers in much of the Pacific Northwest. This crusade is significant because it resulted in the region's first major outburst of industrial violence and its first widespread, sustained interest in a radical social and economic critique. Apart from the obvious desire to rid the area of competing Chinese labor, the crusade of unemployed Caucasians and their allies generated and popularized a series of explanations for hard times. In a larger sense, protesters sought to comprehend the sudden economic and demographic changes that severely strained the region's social fabric during the 1880s. Partisans impelled as much by circumstances as by conscious effort proceeded to promulgate ideas that accounted for jobless white workers' abrupt decline in status to outcasts in a promised land and to offer a remedial program. In the process, they popularized a crude ideology of disinheritance that was the chief legacy of the crusade, an ideology that has contributed to a notable strain of militance in the Pacific Northwest.²

Though contemporaries did not speak of an ideology of disinheritance as such, they often voiced an unmistakable fear that monopoly unfairly threatened the political egalitarianism and economic opportunity that they believed to be the birthright of settlers in America's undeveloped West. They worried, too, that the growing power of big business undermined the dignity and worth of individual producers—farmers and industrial workers alike. The *Seattle Daily Press* in the mid-1880s, for example, warned that “probably no other part of the country presents greater opportunities for the growth of corporate monopolies than this territory. Nowhere is it more the duty of the people to see to it that the grasp of these corporations is not confirmed, and to see to it that the people themselves and not the corporations are the governing power.” The region's newspapers also published crudely drawn maps depicting the Northern Pacific Railway's land grant as an enormous black cloud blighting two-thirds of Washington Territory from Spokane almost to the Pacific Ocean. It made little difference that the land grant was actually a gigantic checkerboard minutely divided into alternate sections of railroad and government land. The real issue for many people was that the railroads and other forms of massed capital had already, or would soon, usurp the individual opportunity that settlers presumed to be their inheritance. The ideology of disinheritance criticized the growing political and economic power of the region's new land and mineral barons and challenged

² *Seattle Daily Post-Intelligencer*, September 13, 1885, p. 2; *Seattle Daily Press*, September 10, 1886, p. 4; *ibid.*, September 14, 1886, p. 4.

their influence by proposing a variety of remedial, sometimes even revolutionary, steps.³

During the course of the anti-Oriental crusade, agitators seized numerous opportunities to expand the vague and poorly articulated protest against unemployment initially used to foment the trouble into a more encompassing ideology of disinheritance. Their new ideology enjoyed widespread appeal because they not only cloaked it with the mantle of a popular movement against the Chinese but also promoted it in terms of ideas already well established in the value system of the people. Included were the tenets of New Testament Christianity, the promise of the American Revolution, and the democracy of Abraham Lincoln. "Labor," anti-Chinese orators fondly quoted Lincoln as saying in his first annual message to Congress, "is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could not have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much of the higher consideration." As interpreted by Lincoln and most of the anti-Chinese agitators, labor encompassed the producing classes in general, not just industrial workers or a proletariat. In the context of the anti-Chinese crusade, remarks such as Lincoln's served easily to goad the unemployed Caucasians into illegal acts of protest against capital's supposed pawns as they sought to restore the lost destiny of America's working citizens.⁴

The anti-Chinese agitation began as a popular response to the depression that swept menacingly across the North Pacific industrial frontier in 1884. The economic downturn was really nationwide, but it dealt Oregon and Washington an especially severe blow. Completion of the region's first railway links to the East in mid-decade and the collapse of the building booms in Seattle and Tacoma released thousands of workers to compete for jobs that hard times made scarce. Many of those seeking work were Chinese immigrants imported during the two decades just past to build the Pacific railroads.⁵

³ Seattle *Daily Press*, August 25, 1886, p. 1; *ibid.*, August 26, 1886, p. 1; *ibid.*, October 13, 1886, p. 2 (quotation); Portland *Oregonian*, October 5, 1885, p. 2; *ibid.*, January 25, 1886, p. 1; *ibid.*, July 2, 1886, p. 2; Ronald L. Rosbach, "The Lieu Land Controversy in Eastern Washington" (master's thesis, State College of Washington, 1957), 87-88.

⁴ Abraham Lincoln, "First Annual Message [December 3, 1861]," James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (20 vols., New York, 1897), VII, 3258; Seattle *Daily Call*, October 21, 1885, p. 3; *ibid.*, November 24, 1885, p. 1; *ibid.*, February 27, 1886, p. 2; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York, 1967), 14.

⁵ John H. McGraw, "The Anti-Chinese Riots of 1885," *Washington State Historical Society. Publications II (1907-1914)* (Olympia, Washington, 1915), 388-97;

In the struggle for jobs, Caucasian workers reluctantly conceded that the Chinese were formidable adversaries—"industrious to a fault, apt, skillful, obedient," able to live on wages "upon which a white man would starve, and in a condition utterly repellent to him. Without families to support, except in rare cases, their advantage over the American laborer [is] enormous." "Heathen John," added another observer, "is, of course, quite as willing to work on Sunday as on any other day." Caucasian workers and their middle-class allies especially feared that the region's new industrial monopolies would import a potentially unlimited supply of Chinese labor, thereby permanently reducing whites on the Pacific Coast to "inferiors in power and numbers."⁶

Whites who saw themselves battling Chinese for jobs drew inspiration from the cultural prejudice and anti-Chinese racism prevailing on the West Coast. The Seattle *Daily Call*, for example, a paper popular with the unemployed, variously labeled the Chinese "treacherous, almond-eyed sons of Confucius," "chattering, round-mouthed lepers," and "yellow heathen." Complaining about the "mysterious language" and "vicious and demoralizing" habits of Chinese, whites loudly warned that the only way to compete with a "Chinaman is to adopt pagan ideas and pagan modes of life." Caucasian coal miners in the camps east of Seattle and Tacoma lustily sang:

"We rather live amongst the fleas
Than be with you—the old Chinese . . ."⁷

Seattle *Daily Press*, December 31, 1886, p. 3; *ibid.*, March 26, 1888, p. 2; Portland *Oregonian*, October 1, 1885, p. 2; *ibid.*, January 1, 1886, p. 6.

⁶ Emma H. Adams, *To and Fro, Up and Down in Southern California, Oregon and Washington Territory* (Cincinnati, 1888), 432 (first quotation); Henry T. Finck, *The Pacific Coast Scenic Tour* (New York, 1890), 168–69 (second quotation); Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Tacoma, 1885," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXIII (August 1954), 271–83; Jules Alexander Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle, 1885, 1886," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 39 (April 1948), 103–30.

⁷ Seattle *Daily Call*, September 17, 1885, p. 3 (first quotation); *ibid.*, October 1, 1885, p. 3 (second quotation); *ibid.*, December 30, 1885, p. 3 (third quotation). Another example of the cultural prejudice and virulent racism seemingly omnipresent on Puget Sound appeared in a booklet issued by the Union Pacific Railway in 1889: "Among no nationality that comes to our shores are more worthless loiterers to be seen [than among the Chinese]. The barbarism of the Indian is much to be preferred. Both treat women as slaves. The one arrives at it by barbarous ignorance, the other through an enlightened design. It is quite paradoxical that the civilization of growing America should harbor a race, who know no legitimate use for the female sex. Theirs is a civilization we should not tolerate if we could, and could not practice if we would. The meaning of the word disgust is only known to those who have visited a Chinese settlement." Union Pacific Railway, *Wealth and Resources of Oregon and Washington, the Pacific Northwest* (Portland, Oregon, 1889), 154. See also Sylvester Pennoyer, *Inaugural Address of Governor Sylvester Pennoyer to the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon, 1887* (Salem, Oregon, 1887), 24–30.

"The Chinese must go!" was an utterance heard frequently in Pacific Northwest communities in September and October 1885. Residents discussed little else but expulsion. Daily they grew ever more excited—or anxious. It was "War! War! War!" screamed an advertisement for Seattle's great IXL clothing store, which catered to a mass market. "The Chinese must go! The IXL says so."⁸

The person who did the most to give the expulsion crusade direction was Daniel Cronin, a thirty-eight-year-old carpenter who came from California to Puget Sound in the summer of 1885. A man of mystery, he proved a skillful orator and persuasive genius. As organizer for the Knights of Labor in Washington Territory, Cronin exploited the discontent caused by hard times and seemingly overnight transformed a faltering, intimidated band of workers into a militant and idealistic brotherhood widely believed to number several thousand. Only nominally linked to the national organization of Knights, the territory's first large-scale labor organization bore Cronin's highly personal stamp.⁹

Cronin used the growing power of the Knights to grasp the leadership of the anti-Chinese crusade. To a September meeting of Seattle's milling and disorganized Sinophobes, he boasted that he had a plan to rid Puget Sound of Chinese within a few weeks. "I was in Eureka, California, when the edict went forth that the Chinese must go," and he proposed to inform listeners how Eureka had successfully expelled its Chinese the previous February. He ominously warned that if Seattle's Chinese were not removed, "there will be riot and bloodshed this winter." Cronin and a group of associates who had worked themselves into the leadership of the region's Knights of Labor rapidly perfected plans for Chinese expulsion. They maneuvered Sinophobes into calling a territorial anti-Chinese congress, which met in Seattle in late September 1885 and decreed that all Chinese must leave Washington no later than November 1. Once local coordinating committees formed, Cronin, for reasons that remain unknown, temporarily stepped aside and let others handle the details of expulsion.¹⁰

⁸ Adams, *To and Fro*, 431; *Seattle Daily Call*, January 12, 1886, p. 4 (quotation).

⁹ The story of the Knights of Labor in the Pacific Northwest is detailed in Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885–1917* (Seattle, 1979), 22–29.

¹⁰ *Seattle Daily Post-Intelligencer*, September 22, 1885, p. 1 (quotation); Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle," 105–6. Several faltering attempts to institutionalize anti-Chinese agitation in Tacoma after February 1885 are described in Murray Morgan, *Puget's Sound: A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound* (Seattle, 1979), 222–26. For an account of the Eureka expulsion see Lynwood Carranco, "Chinese Expulsion from Humboldt County," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXX (November 1961), 329–40.

Among the prominent community leaders involved in the movement was a German immigrant shopkeeper and member of the Knights of Labor, R. Jacob Weisbach, mayor of Tacoma. Journalist Emma Adams, who happened to be touring Puget Sound during the uproar, interviewed Weisbach and asked him how he planned to get rid of the 700 Chinese who comprised approximately one-tenth of Tacoma's population. The mayor replied, "I can not now state exactly. They have been informed that they *must* leave. The time allowed them for preparation has expired. They are aware of that. If any of them choose to tarry and take the consequences, we can not help it." Adams wondered if many of Tacoma's citizens opposed the movement "against cheap labor." "Not many," answered Weisbach, as he proceeded to explain the broader implications of the struggle. "We have here two classes. One lives on the products of its own labor. The other subsists on the fruits of other people's toil. The latter class laments the loss of the Chinese."

Weisbach's sweeping division of society into producers and drones—language more akin to that used by the Knights of Labor and the later Populists than by Marx—exemplified one of the most ambiguous aspects of the evolving ideology of disinheritance. Some listeners might interpret such rhetoric as a call for class warfare to eliminate the capitalists, while others, believing that it implicitly recognized the American dream of economic plenty and social advance for all honest toilers, heard it as a challenge to reform the economic system by eliminating its worst abuses.¹¹

Oregonian editor Harvey Scott had no doubts about where Weisbach stood. To Scott, Weisbach was a "German Communist," but like most other observers he probably remained unaware of the secret ties linking Weisbach, Cronin, and other revolutionary Knights who plotted the anti-Chinese crusade. In various ways all were associated with the International Workingmen's Association of San Francisco. Describing itself as a "secret, mysterious world-wide" organization that was "quietly honeycombing society," the IWA claimed to be a branch of the Marxist First International. Actually the IWA to which Cronin and his associates belonged was a product of the feverish imagination of a young San Francisco attorney, Burnette G. Haskell. "Perpetually playing games," Haskell was, in the words of historian Alexander Saxton, "a kind of Tom Sawyer never grown up; yet the games he played were at the shadow line of nightmare." His radical faith was a strange and confused blend of anarchism and socialism. He organized several secret groups under the names "Invisible Republic" and "The Illuminati" before boldly appropriating the title of Karl Marx's defunct First International.¹²

¹¹ Adams, *To and Fro*, 436–37.

Unfortunately, the clandestine nature of the IWA makes it impossible to assess accurately the full extent of its influence, to know precisely which turns and twists of the anti-Chinese crusade resulted from prior planning and which grew out of popular sentiment. It is possible—even probable—that Cronin left Eureka, the most important center of IWA influence outside San Francisco, fully intending to organize unemployed Pacific Northwest workers for the IWA. One point is clear, however, with its members or sympathizers leading both the local Knights of Labor and the anti-Chinese movement, the IWA operated like a wheel within a wheel, intending to use the popular issue of Chinese expulsion to foment fundamental economic change. Racism and radicalism thereby joined hands.¹³

In the frequent torchlight parades in Tacoma, Seattle, and elsewhere, white workingmen displayed banners reading “Discharge Your Chinese” and “Down with the Mongolian Slave,” but some banners also boldly proclaimed “Elevate the Masses.” Despite occasional talk of class warfare by self-educated political theorists like Weisbach and Cronin, most participants in the movement apparently did not intend to overthrow capitalism but wanted, rather, to curtail the power of those who abused the system by degrading white laborers. In any case, an ideology of disinheritance soon evolved from the level of crude anti-Chinese epithets and ambiguous references to class warfare into a set of political demands embodied in the platforms of regional protest parties and candidates.¹⁴

The evolution of the ideology of disinheritance was largely a process of education, of making people see things in a new way, of recasting vague resentments into a set of specific demands. The twentieth-century tendency to equate education solely with formal schooling obscures the way that public lyceums and study clubs once functioned as agencies of adult education. “The Knights of Labor,” observed the Seattle *Daily Call*, “is the best organization ever inaugurated to unite and educate the industrial people. Each assembly is a school where true political economy is discussed.” Thus, even if the majority of jobless participated in the Sino-phobic crusade solely to remove their Chinese competitors—real or imag-

¹² Portland *Oregonian*, November 9, 1885, p. 2 (first quotation); “What the IWA Is,” pamphlet in the Burnette G. Haskell papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (second quotation); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971), 164, 194–98 (second quotation); Ralph Edward Shaffer, “Radicalism in California, 1869–1929” (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1962), 20–25; Chester McArthur Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865–1901* (Chicago, 1966), 78–104.

¹³ Seattle *Daily Press*, September 25, 1886, p. 4; Morgan, *Puget’s Sound*, 222–26. Knights leader Terence Powderly maintained that it was the official policy of the IWA to “capture the order.” Terence V. Powderly, *Thirty Years of Labor, 1859 to 1889* (New York, 1967), 279.

¹⁴ Seattle *Daily Call*, October 26, 1885, p. 4.

ined—they could not avoid insinuations about the relationship between unemployment and political and economic power. In street-corner forums and Knights of Labor lyceums, agitators energized listeners by the sneer they attached to such words as “Chinaman” and “Northern Pacific” railroad. The two hateful terms grew intertwined in the minds of many of Washington’s unemployed. The issue was power. The Northern Pacific, it was widely believed, had the power, and “the people” did not. The railroad not only owned an immense amount of land in Washington but also allegedly corrupted legislators, controlled newspapers, and attempted to stifle public protest. The railroad was supposed to use Chinese labor in an undisguised effort to undercut prevailing wage rates and displace white workers.¹⁵

Ironically perhaps, agitators endeavoring to generate popular resentment toward the power of the new industrial monopolies had an unlikely and unwitting set of allies: land speculators and urban boosters. Most were more or less honest, but some had sold their souls for a fistful of dollars. All tended to exaggerate the virtues of Oregon and Washington in the promotional literature they issued by the ton. “On whatever part of the Pacific Coast the traveler may roam,” observed one contemporary, “he is sure to stumble upon some publication ‘devoted to the Great West.’ ” In the mid-1880s one agency alone—Oregon’s state board of immigration—distributed more than 400,000 copies of pamphlets such as *Oregon as It Is: Solid Facts and Actual Results*. Among the “solid facts” was a guarantee of success to any laborer willing to work. The speculators and boosters were dream makers. Thousands of immigrants who believed along with Thoreau that “eastward I go only by force but westward I go free” set out for the Great Northwest, transported as much by myth as by rail or sailing ship. The coming of hard times in 1884 that brought wage workers reduced incomes and unemployment also snuffed out their dreams of a good life in a promising new land. Hard times mocked promoters’ guarantees of success and bred hard feelings in many of the newcomers. Bitter and discontented, the jobless easily believed that their inheritance had been snatched unjustly from them.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, January 26, 1886, p. 4 (quotation); *Seattle Daily Press*, August 25, 1885, p. 1; *ibid.*, August 26, 1886, p. 1; *Portland Oregonian*, October 5, 1885, p. 2; *ibid.*, January 25, 1886, p. 1; *ibid.*, July 2, 1886, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Report to the Legislative Assembly of the State Board of Immigration of the State of Oregon, 1887* (Salem, Oregon, 1887); *Journal of the Senate, Oregon, 1887* (Salem, Oregon, 1887), 420–21; Adams, *To and Fro*, 375 (first quotation); State Board of Immigration, *Oregon as It Is: Solid Facts and Actual Results* (Portland, Oregon, ca. 1885), 24. Promises of success are repeated in so many promotional pamphlets that it is impossible to list them all. The depression of the mid-1880s did nothing to stem their publication, as the following excerpt from the opening lines of a Union Pacific

Instead of resigning themselves to poverty as they might have done, the unemployed grew militant. The agitators who educated them to see corporate power and the capitalist system in a new light first suggested what they could do about the immediate problem of unemployment. The most popular solution—Chinese removal—was to deny monopolies the pawns they used to drive down wages and reduce proud men with a rich heritage to begging for jobs and food to sustain their families. People who believed that monopolies used their power over legislators to thwart the democratic process—to prevent the passage or enforcement of laws designed to encourage Chinese to leave the Pacific Northwest—were not above adopting extralegal methods.

In her interview with Mayor Weisbach, Adams asked whether acts of violence would be committed against the Chinese:

“None whatever,” responded Weisbach. “The probable course will be a strict system of boycotting, which will certainly result in their departure”

“You are confident that the order of the Knights of Labor will succeed in expelling these men from the city?”

“It will. Undoubtedly it will.”¹⁷

Despite Weisbach’s rejection of violence, agitators used claims of Caucasian disinheritance to justify actions that transgressed the thin line between order and violence. Because so many Chinese were supposedly smuggled into Oregon and Washington after passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Seattle *Daily Call* charged that their ways “are so dark and furtive that their tricks cannot be detected and unearthed. They come here like an army of rats to gnaw—of grasshoppers to consume” Warning that “self-preservation is the first law of nature,” the paper pointedly reminded workers that the Chinese were in the United States in defiance of the law and thus had “forfeited the protection of our laws.” Thus participants in the anti-Chinese outrage were taught to regard their victims as subhumans who could claim no legal rights. That notion animated Puget Sound’s Sinophobes and encouraged them to take a militant stance that risked violence.¹⁸

Railway promotional brochure published in 1889 illustrates: Oregon and Washington “offer to the unemployed, and scantily paid workingman of the East, who traces his steps along the weary ways of want, a home in a locality where comforts and conveniences combine to lighten labor’s task, and placate poverty with plenty; a locality, in short, where the winter’s cold never pinches nor summer’s heat ever prostrates; and where even the very poor can suffer no deep distress.” Union Pacific Railway, *Wealth and Resources of Oregon and Washington*, 1.

¹⁷ Adams, *To and Fro*, 437–38.

¹⁸ Seattle *Daily Call*, November 19, 1885, p. 2.

In early September 1885, a short time prior to the calling of Washington's territorial anti-Chinese congress and less than a week after Knights of Labor miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming, wantonly attacked Chinese miners and killed twenty-eight and wounded fifteen, violence erupted on Puget Sound. A small group of whites and Indians murdered three Chinese hop pickers in the Squak valley east of Seattle. Four days later, on September 11, at the Newcastle mines of the Oregon Improvement Company, one of the largest and most powerful coal operators in the territory, a dozen masked men ignited the quarters where thirty-seven Chinese workers slept. The Orientals escaped the blaze but lost their belongings. Finally, on the morning of November 3 the screech of a steam whistle signaled the last phase of Tacoma's efforts to expel its Chinese. While the mayor and sheriff stood by as spectators, members of the Committee of Fifteen (a coordinating body), the Committee of Nine (a semisecret group probably allied with the International Workingmen's Association), and several hundred others invaded the Chinese quarters. The methods they used to rout the remaining Chinese bore no resemblance to a boycott.¹⁹

Because detailed accounts of the Tacoma and Seattle expulsions have already been published, it is necessary only to summarize these two incidents and add a brief description of agitation in Portland before analyzing how confrontation and violence fostered further interest in the ideology of disinheritance and led to its incorporation into the platforms of the region's several labor-oriented protest parties and candidates. The crowd of whites that visited Tacoma's Chinese quarters ordered inhabitants to "pack up at once." Most complied, some begged for more time. In the afternoon about 200 Chinese, accompanied by several wagons of luggage and an escort of whites, journeyed out of Tacoma to a small Northern Pacific station nine miles away. A cold rain fell steadily as the strange procession passed into open country. The Chinese women rode on the wagons; some of the men stumbled through their tears. One man tried to buy food at a market, but the shopkeeper persistently refused, even though the Chinese pleaded, "Me Hungry. Me Starve." After an overnight stay in the Northern Pacific station, during which two Chinese died of exposure, the remainder were forced aboard a train for Portland. Meanwhile, fires of suspicious origin reduced Tacoma's Chinese quarters to smoking debris.

¹⁹ Paul Crane and Alfred Larson, "The Chinese Massacre," *Annals of Wyoming*, 12 (January 1940), 47–51, 153–61; Seattle *Daily Post-Intelligencer*, September 13, 1885, p. 2; C. William Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Company: 1880–1930" (master's thesis, University of Washington, 1965), 51; Robert E. Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, 1850–1910" (doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1964), 99; Portland *Oregonian*, November 4, 1885, p. 4; Tacoma *Daily Ledger*, November 4, 1885, p. 2.

Everyone suspected arson. Police promptly arrested one tarrying Chinese but soon set him free for lack of evidence.²⁰

The expulsion was a classic case of frontier vigilantism. As was often typical of such episodes, it enjoyed the active support of many prominent community leaders, including Mayor Weisbach, Probate Judge James Wickersham, two councilmen, and the editor of one of the city's influential daily newspapers. Their involvement is no doubt the major reason the expulsion proceeded so smoothly.²¹

News of the event traveled to Seattle and Washington, D.C., at telegraph speed. While Seattle's Sinophobes excitedly discussed the virtues of the "Tacoma Method," as the expulsion was euphemistically labeled, President Grover Cleveland acted. He ordered troops from Ft. Vancouver to Puget Sound, believing the area to be in a state of insurrection. "What insurrection?" asked perpetrators as they returned peaceably to their homes. They wondered what soldiers would do when they reached Tacoma:

"How will they manage to put down a people who are not in rebellion?"

"Let them come," said the calm-minded. "We shall be glad to see them. It will give the boys a change."²²

The soldiers soon appeared, a portion encamped in Tacoma, and 350 proceeded to Seattle to prevent any expulsion attempt there. A grand jury that was hastily convened in Vancouver indicted twenty-seven Tacoma citizens, charging them with conspiracy and insurrection in violation of the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act. The same act was also used to jail Cronin and sixteen other prominent members of Seattle's anti-Chinese movement. The action prevented trouble but also made martyrs of those arrested.²³

Alleged conspirators were indicted several times during the course of the anti-Chinese crusade, but no jury ever found any of them guilty. After a lengthy trial in Seattle in January 1886, for example, jurymen took less than ten minutes to find Cronin and his codefendants innocent. At about the same time the upper house of the territorial legislature narrowly de-

²⁰ Adams, *To and Fro*, 440-42. Among the best accounts of the outbursts are the two Jules Alexander Karlin essays, Murray Morgan's *Puget Sound*, and Robert E. Wynne's dissertation, all previously cited, and B. P. Wilcox, "Anti-Chinese Riots in Washington," *Washington Historical Quarterly*, 20 (July 1929), 204-12; and James A. Halseth and Bruce A. Glasrud, "Anti-Chinese Movements in Washington, 1885-1886: A Reconsideration," James A. Halseth and Bruce A. Glasrud, *The Northwest Mosaic: Minority Conflicts in Pacific Northwest History* (Boulder, Colorado, 1977), 116-39.

²¹ Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreak in Tacoma," 279-81.

²² George Dudley Lawson, "The Tacoma Method," *Overland Monthly*, 7 (March 1886), 234-39; Adams, *To and Fro*, 443-45 (quotations).

²³ *Seattle Daily Call*, November 14, 1885, p. 1; *ibid.*, November 21, 1885, p. 1; Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle," 113-14.

feated several popularly demanded anti-Chinese bills. Angered by what they regarded as legislative arrogance and emboldened by the outcome of the conspiracy trial and the removal of federal troops from Puget Sound, Seattle's Sinophobes sprang into action. As in Tacoma, a coordinating committee and a crowd of sympathizers met at the sound of a prearranged signal, and on the morning of February 7 they swept noisily through the city's Chinese quarters. They pounded on doors, broke windows, and warned the Chinese to prepare immediately for the afternoon departure of the *Queen of the Pacific*.²⁴

Unlike the Tacoma expulsion, the one in Seattle resulted in bloodshed when whites divided into two opposing camps. King County Sheriff John H. McGraw worked with the city's upper class, or Opera House party, to oppose any extralegal action. The Knights' expulsion efforts faltered in the face of opponents determined to uphold the law. Last-minute legal action instituted by a Chinese merchant to halt the removal caused the Chinese to remain at the dock overnight. A skeleton guard of Knights maintained a vigilant watch while deputies protected sleeping Chinese in a nearby warehouse. The *Queen* sailed the next day with 197 Chinese aboard, about as many as the steamship could safely hold. That afternoon a crowd of workers clashed with citizen deputies, or Home Guards, who attempted to escort the remaining Chinese from the dock back to their homes to await another ship. Curses led to hand-to-hand fighting and then to gunfire. Five people were wounded in the melee, one workman fatally. Shocked and sobered, the anti-Chinese crowd retreated and milled around while leaders desperately worked to prevent further bloodshed. Territorial governor Watson C. Squire declared martial law and suspended the writ of habeas corpus. Once again President Cleveland dispatched federal troops to Seattle.²⁵

As soldiers patrolled the strangely subdued streets of Seattle, the focus of the anti-Chinese movement shifted south to Portland, where more Chinese lived than in all of Washington Territory. Some of Portland's white workers had begun in early September 1885 to take the same organizational steps that culminated in violence and martial law on Puget Sound. Seasoned agitator Cronin offered guidance to the nascent movement. When he arrived in Portland in late January 1886, Knights of

²⁴ Seattle *Daily Call*, January 16, 1886, p. 4; Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle," 118–20.

²⁵ Clinton A. Snowden, *History of Washington: The Rise and Progress of an American State* (4 vols., New York City, 1909), IV, 334–43; Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle," 120–29; McGraw, "The Anti-Chinese Riots of 1885," 388–97. The John H. McGraw piece is a reprint of a letter he sent as King County sheriff to territorial governor Watson C. Squire giving his view of the troubles.

Labor and members of the anti-coolie clubs gave him a tumultuous welcome. Hailed as a hero and martyr in the "late ku klux farce in Seattle," Cronin participated in a grand procession that had all the trappings of a coronation or an affair of state.²⁶

Joining Cronin was Haskell, now head of the IWA on the Pacific Coast. At Cronin's urging, radicals in the Portland assemblies of the Knights of Labor had invited Haskell to lead the expulsion crusade. He arrived on February 9, the day after martial law had been declared in Seattle. If he had any plans to visit the Puget Sound region, he wisely abandoned them. Together with Cronin and visiting Knights from Salem and Tacoma, Haskell staged an anti-Chinese congress in Portland on the eve of Washington's birthday. The meeting passed resolutions calling for impeachment of territorial governor Squire, removal of Portland's Chinese within thirty days, and a boycott of the Portland *Oregonian*, the only prominent paper in the Pacific Northwest to defend the Chinese. Haskell, Cronin, and Nathan Baker, a leader of the local anti-coolie association, also launched a new journal, the *Oregon Alarm*, which had as its motto, "The Tools Belong to the Toilers; the Products to the Producers."²⁷

The Chinese fled or were driven out from some of the surrounding communities, but in Portland itself the racist campaign sputtered and eventually stalled in the face of determined opposition. The radical Knights who believed Haskell's presence would somehow guarantee Chinese removal were disappointed. Haskell quietly sailed back to San Francisco after spending less than two weeks in the Pacific Northwest, and a Portland grand jury charged Cronin with conspiring to deprive the Chinese of their rights. Portland was clearly not another Tacoma or Seattle, a fact that imperious Scott of the *Oregonian* alluded to with pride and relief.²⁸

Scott attempted to analyze the successes and failures of the agitators. The Tacoma expulsion, he said, was successful only because Tacoma was still "raw and immature." Having been founded only recently as the western terminus of the Northern Pacific Railway, Tacoma retained many

²⁶ Jack E. Triplett, Jr., "History of the Oregon Labor Movement Prior to the New Deal" (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1961), 157-58; Portland *Oregonian*, October 1, 1885, p. 2; *ibid.*, January 20, 1886, pp. 3, 4; Seattle *Daily Call*, December 1, 1886, p. 3; *Puget Sound Weekly Cooperator*, February 4, 1886, p. 3 (quotation); *John Swinton's Paper*, January 3, 1886, p. 2; *ibid.*, January 24, 1886, p. 3.

²⁷ Portland *Oregonian*, September 30, 1885, p. 2; *ibid.*, February 12, 1886, p. 2; *ibid.*, February 13, 1886, pp. 2, 3; *ibid.*, February 14, 1886, p. 5; *ibid.*, February 27, 1886, p. 2; Denver *Labor Enquirer*, February 13, 1886, p. 3; *ibid.*, February 27, 1886, p. 2 (quotation).

²⁸ Portland *Oregonian*, March 1, 1886, p. 3; *ibid.*, March 18, 1886, p. 4; Denver *Labor Enquirer*, April 24, 1886, p. 2.

elements of a company town. Consequently, noted Scott, "much of its population, so hastily gathered, is of the unstable class. Innovation is their motto, conservatism they detest." Furthermore, "the better class of inhabitants are new to each other and to their situation, and scarcely know how to meet new emergencies." The Seattle agitation, the *Oregonian* editor similarly argued, "could take place only in a frontier community, governed like a mining camp, under a very primitive civilization." Census figures support Scott's implication that Tacoma and Seattle, unlike Portland, contained a majority of newcomers. During the decade of the 1880s, Seattle's population increased by over 1,000 percent, and Tacoma's population increased by an even more incredible 3,000 percent. Among the newcomers were those who had journeyed west expecting to claim the promised land, but hard times dashed their unrealistic aspirations and expectations and made them susceptible to the notion that they must fight to regain their inheritance. In other words, as labor historian Herbert Gutman has noted, "Aspirations and expectations interpret experience and thereby help shape behavior."²⁹

In terms of its immediate goal, the crusade to expel the Chinese from the Pacific Northwest achieved only partial success. Apart from Tacoma and a few small towns—mostly Cascade-area coal camps—the effort faltered. In Seattle whites battled whites in a brief but bloody confrontation, and in Portland, Cronin's attempt to generate enthusiasm for Chinese removal backfired. Indeed, the whole affair split the city's labor movement, discredited the Knights of Labor, and led General Master Workman Terence V. Powderly to recall Cronin's commission as an organizer. Thereafter Cronin dropped from sight and apparently joined a small utopian commune on the Oregon coast.³⁰

In another sense, however, the crusade of the disinherited was notably successful: it called widespread attention to the grievances of workers. Because the 1886 violence in Seattle occurred almost simultaneously with bread riots in London and industrial violence in the Pittsburgh area, alarmed conservatives linked events on Puget Sound with an international revolutionary conspiracy. Chicago's Haymarket riot followed by a sensationalist grand jury report on the Seattle outburst seemingly confirmed

²⁹ Portland *Oregonian*, September 30, 1885, p. 2 (fourth quotation); *ibid.*, October 15, 1885, p. 4 (second quotation); *ibid.*, November 6, 1885, p. 2 (third quotation); *ibid.*, November 9, 1885, p. 2 (first quotation); Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York, 1976), 29. Population statistics were derived from the official census reports issued by the United States government.

³⁰ Powderly to Daniel Cronin, May 7, 1886, Terence V. Powderly Papers, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.; *The People* (New York), April 5, 1891, p. 5.

their worst fears. Thus for many nonworking-class residents of a hitherto geographically isolated region, confrontation and violence on Puget Sound represented a frightening introduction into the mainstream of the nation's social and economic controversies. It startled people who had previously been uninterested in, or unaware of, the Pacific Northwest's growing number of wage workers and their struggle with unemployment. In many quarters the outburst earned organized labor a new measure of respect.³¹

The worldwide unrest prompted the moderate Tacoma *Daily Ledger* to speculate that "there must be some monstrous evil at the foundation of our political and economic structure to render it as weak and toppling as it is." Suggesting just how deep the notion of disinheritance had penetrated community consciousness, the *Ledger* argued that the unrest was caused by the "unjust and inequitable distribution of the products of labor whereby thousands live from hand to mouth in filthy, disease and crime engendering hovels, while the lucky few waste the substance of the land in vain displays and luxurious living." The paper called for a modification of the present system to effect "a more just distribution" of the products of labor without removing proper incentives to sobriety and industry. The signs of the times so disturbed E. V. Smalley, editor of the booster publication *The Northwest Magazine*, that he publicly urged ministers to consider laying aside their "out-grown theology to grapple with the real troubles of humanity which concern the ways of living decently and happily in this world and not how to get to Heaven." Society, said Smalley, could no longer afford to ignore the workers' cry that the "fruit of their labor is not equitably distributed." Such social and economic critiques appearing in two publications generally regarded as spokesmen for Northern Pacific interests helped further legitimate the ideology of disinheritance.³²

As a result of labor's new prominence, it wielded increased political influence in several important urban centers in Oregon and Washington. Many who opposed labor's extralegal action against the Chinese nonetheless favored their removal. Thus in all communities where anti-Chinese passions ran high, astute politicians knew what course to follow when the Knights steered their crusade into the political arena. Sylvester Pennoyer of Portland, a cultured, Harvard-educated lawyer, was one of those who clearly recognized an opportunity. Though he had little in common with the likes of Cronin, he was a popular figure with workingmen. Largely because of his outspoken anti-Chinese stand, Pennoyer captured the Democratic party's gubernatorial nomination. His campaign speeches

³¹ Tacoma *Daily Ledger*, February 9, 1886, p. 1; *ibid.*, February 10, 1886, p. 2; Seattle *Daily Press*, May 12, 1886, p. 2.

³² Tacoma *Daily Ledger*, February 10, 1886, p. 2; E. V. Smalley, "Discontent of the Laboring Classes," *Northwest Magazine*, 4 (February 1886), 25.

brought cheering workers to their feet and popularized the ideology of disinheritance when he warned that “to-day the great producing and laboring classes of our state are being ground down between the upper and nether millstones of corporate power and cheap servile labor” and that if Chinese immigration continued “it will only be a few years until the Willamette valley will be the home only of rich capitalists and Chinese serfs.”³³

Penroyer led the Democratic party to victory in Oregon’s June 1886 election, and as governor he did not forget the workers who had voted for him. In his inaugural address he urged legislators to abolish the state’s immigration board so despised by organized labor. Said Penroyer, “If the early pioneers of forty or fifty years ago could find Oregon without a trail through the forests or over deserts, immigrants that desire to come here now can undoubtedly find their way.” The governor also convinced legislators to make Oregon the first state officially to recognize Labor Day as a holiday.³⁴

Left-wing Knights, buoyed by the success of their protest parties in the Seattle and Tacoma municipal elections in mid-1886, launched a territorial People’s party later that year. As Washington’s congressional delegate they nominated William Newell of Olympia, a former territorial governor, who eagerly accepted. They also drew up a platform that began with the words, “The People’s Party announces this truth: That when bad men and drones combine, the industrials must associate or they will fall an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.” Among the platform’s twenty-six planks were calls for legislation to exclude all Chinese from the United States “except the authenticated agents of the government of that country,” for increasing the money supply, a graduated income tax, abolition of convict labor, factory and mine inspection, direct election of U.S. senators, elimination of free railway passes and discriminatory rates, a mechanic’s lien law, and suppression of the use of “intoxicating liquors.” One plank idealistically proclaimed that “we believe that equal duties and equal responsibilities should receive equal remuneration regardless of race, color, creed or sex, and we will oppose all efforts to disenfranchise the women of Washington Territory,” but another denounced the Chinese as a “standing menace to our laboring classes and a

³³ *Seattle Daily Call*, December 5, 1885, p. 3; *ibid.*, January 7, 1886, p. 4; *ibid.*, January 13, 1886, p. 1; *Portland Oregonian*, May 5, 1886, pp. 4, 8 (quotation). Details of Sylvester Penroyer’s life are available in Maude Davis Chapman, “Sylvester Penroyer, Governor of Oregon, 1887–1895” (master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 1943).

³⁴ [Salem] *Oregon Statesman*, January 14, 1887, p. 5 (quotation); *Seattle Daily Press*, June 11, 1886, p. 2; *John Swinton Paper*, July 4, 1886, p. 1; *Journal of United Labor*, June 18, 1887, p. 2430. For additional information on Oregon’s Labor Day see the *Portland Oregonian*, September 4, 1972, p. 19.

disgrace to a civilized nation.” Their multifaceted platform represented a significant milestone in the perfection and promotion of the ideology of disinheritance. It survived the defeat and demise of the People’s party movement of the 1880s and the Republican resurgence that accompanied the return of prosperity a few months after the Seattle riot. In 1891 it served as a model for the first platform adopted by a far more successful protest party—Washington’s Populist party of the 1890s. Many of the founding fathers of the state’s Populist party, incidentally, were Knights formerly active in the anti-Chinese crusade. Also converted to Populism in the 1890s was Oregon’s Pennoyer.³⁵

Participation in the anti-Chinese movement taught Pacific Northwest labor contradictory lessons. The skilled workers—who supported the newly formed American Federation of Labor (1886), put down roots in the community, enrolled their children in public schools, and planted roses around their bungalows—generally cast aside the idealism of the Knights and rejected even the radical elements of the ideology of disinheritance. Members of this moderate to conservative group, according to Knight-turned-AFL-organizer C. O. Young, “began to learn what the organization of labor really meant. We ceased to some extent at least to live in the land of dreams and faced realities. We began to struggle for economic necessities, the reduction of hours, increase of wages, and other conditions of employment.” Young’s view may have been colored by his experience in jail as a participant in Seattle’s anti-Chinese crusade, but it was likely a natural expression of those members of the working class who learned that their skills enabled them to enjoy a modest portion of the world’s goods—to claim, in other words, an acceptable inheritance.³⁶

The ascendant craft unionists like Young scornfully derided the Knights for their “impractical visionary philosophies” and expelled them from the communitywide labor councils that Knights had helped to found. But as the Knights declined in the late 1880s, AFL affiliates proved philosophically and organizationally unprepared to unionize the unskilled and semiskilled workers formerly attracted to the Knights. Thus the Pacific Northwest’s numerous migratory lumberjacks, hardrock miners, coal miners, and harvest hands remained outside the mainstream of organized labor

³⁵ *Seattle Daily Press*, May 6, 1886, p. 2; *ibid.*, July 9, 1886, pp. 1, 4; *ibid.*, September 6, 1886, p. 2 (quotation); *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, May 4, 1886, p. 4; *ibid.*, May 5, 1886, p. 4; [Seattle] *Daily Voice of the People*, September 13, 1886, p. 3; *Portland Oregonian*, May 31, 1902, p. 13. See also Thomas Wayne Riddle, “The Old Radicalism in America: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington, 1891–1900” (doctoral dissertation, Washington State University, 1976), 121–29.

³⁶ Washington State Federation of Labor, *Official Year Book of Organized Labor, 1930* ([Seattle, ca. 1930]), 18.

for several decades. At the same time, the old dream of coming west to claim the promised land and with it a secure position in American society continued to exert a powerful attraction. As late as 1915 a member of the Industrial Workers of the World complained that for years “the Golden West has been the Mecca in the dream of the misguided worker in all parts of the country. If I can only get West, has been his only thought.” Thus for reasons not unlike those that motivated people to participate in the anti-Chinese crusade of the 1880s, successive members of the region’s sometimes downtrodden, but always expectant, producing classes gravitated into economic and political organizations that transmitted and updated versions of the ideology of disinheritance—the Alliance and Populist movements and later the Socialist parties, the Western Federation of Miners, and the Industrial Workers of the World. All such organizations provided members a sense of social solidarity, enriched individual lives through a feeling of participation in epochal world events, and encouraged them to fight for their inheritance.³⁷

As for the Pacific Northwest’s anti-Chinese crusade of the 1880s, it was without question a deplorable episode of racism—sordid, ugly, and thoroughly paradoxical. If it convinced one group of workers that the Knights were on the wrong track, it taught another lesson to those who continued to see themselves as outcasts and downtrodden in a promised land: confrontation got results. Even the bloody setback in Seattle attracted attention to their grievances and helped win a measure of popular support for political expressions of the ideology of disinheritance. The virtue of militance was a lesson that organizations animated by the ideology of disinheritance would not soon forget. Paradoxically, too, the ideology that encouraged their militance and protests also accounts for the ease with which all but the diehard radicals abandoned the cause after gaining what they regarded as their legitimate, if modest, inheritance.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid., 18; *Solidarity*, May 1, 1915, p. 2.

³⁸ Examples of other groups that learned the virtue of militance can be found in William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, Illinois, 1975), 145–53.