

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***The Homestead Works Strike of 1892***

### **Student Handout: Guided Questions**

	Secondary Source	My Primary Source	Additional information from my group
What type of document is this? When was it published?			
What is the major conflict between workers and management?			
Who was involved?			

	Secondary Source	My Primary Source	Additional information from my group
What were the strikers fighting against? What were they fighting for?			
What actually happened in July 1892 in Homestead?			
Who won out in the end and how?			

## ***The Homestead Works Strike of 1892***

### **Document #1: The Homestead Strike (1999)**

The conflict at Homestead arose at a time when the fast-changing American economy had stumbled and conflicts between labor and management had flared up all over the country. In 1892, labor declared a general strike in New Orleans. Coal miners struck in Tennessee, as did railroad switchmen in Buffalo, New York and copper miners in Idaho.

Carnegie's mighty steel industry was not immune to the downturn. In 1890, the price of rolled-steel products started to decline, dropping from \$35 a gross ton to \$22 early in 1892. In the face of depressed steel prices, Henry C. Frick, general manager of the Homestead plant that Carnegie largely owned, was determined to cut wages and break the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, one of the strongest craft unions in the country.

Behind the scenes, Carnegie supported Frick's plans. . . If the union failed to accept Frick's terms, Carnegie instructed him to shut down the plant and wait until the workers buckled...

With Carnegie's carte blanche support, Frick moved to slash wages. Plant workers responded by hanging Frick in effigy. At the end of June, Frick began closing down his open hearth and armor-plate mills, locking out 1,100 men. On June 25th, Frick announced he would no longer negotiate with the union; now he would only deal with workers individually. Leaders of Amalgamated were willing to concede on almost every level -- except on the dissolution of their union. Workers tried to reach the Carnegie who had strongly defended labor's right to unionize. He had departed on his annual and lengthy vacation, traveling to a remote Scottish castle on Loch Rannoch. He proved inaccessible to all -- including the press and to Homestead's workers -- except for Frick.

. . . Carnegie believed workers would agree to relinquish their union to hold on to their jobs.

It was a severe miscalculation. Although only 750 of the 3,800 workers at Homestead belonged to the union, 3,000 of them met and voted overwhelmingly to strike. Frick responded by building a fence three miles long and 12 feet high around the steelworks plant, adding peepholes for rifles and topping it with barbed wire. Workers named the fence "Fort Frick."

Deputy sheriffs were sworn in to guard the property, but the workers ordered them out of town. Workers then took to guarding the plant that Frick had closed to keep them out. . .

Frick turned to the enforcers he had employed previously: the Pinkerton Detective Agency's private army, often used by industrialists of the era. At midnight on July 5, tugboats pulled barges carrying hundreds of Pinkerton detectives armed with Winchester rifles up the Monongahela River. But workers stationed along the river spotted the private army. A Pittsburgh journalist wrote that at about 3 A.M. a "horseman riding at breakneck speed dashed into the streets of Homestead giving the alarm as he sped along." Thousands

of strikers and their sympathizers rose from their sleep and went down to the riverbank in Homestead.

When the private armies of business arrived, the crowd warned the Pinkertons not to step off the barge. But they did. No one knows which side shot first, but under a barrage of fire, the Pinkertons retreated back to their barges. For 14 hours, gunfire was exchanged. Strikers rolled a flaming freight train car at the barges. They tossed dynamite to sink the boats and pumped oil into the river and tried to set it on fire. By the time the Pinkertons surrendered in the afternoon three detectives and nine workers were dead or dying. The workers declared victory in the bloody battle, but it was a short-lived celebration.

The governor of Pennsylvania ordered state militia into Homestead. Armed with the latest in rifles and Gatling guns, they took over the plant. Strikebreakers who arrived on locked trains, often unaware of their destination or the presence of a strike, took over the steel mills. Four months after the strike was declared, the men's resources were gone and they returned to work. Authorities charged the strike leaders with murder and 160 other strikers with lesser crimes. The workers' entire Strike Committee also was arrested for treason. However, sympathetic juries would convict none of the men.

All the strikers' leaders were blacklisted. The Carnegie Company successfully swept unions out of Homestead and reduced it to a negligible factor in the steel mills throughout the Pittsburgh area.

Source: "The Homestead Strike." *American Experience*,  
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carnegie/peopleevents/pande04.html>>.

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### **Document #2: A Mighty Struggle Ahead (1892)**

#### **CAPITAL AND LABOR TO JOIN IN BATTLE TO-DAY**

#### **The Carnegie Homestead Plant Baricaded and Fortified—Precautions Against Surprises By the Workingmen Who Are On Strike**

PITTSBURG, PENN., June 26—The great combination of interests of which Andrew Carnegie is the head will enter to-morrow upon a conflict that will rank in the industrial annals of the country as one of the most remarkable ever engaged in. It will be a fight for supremacy between the strongest organization of steel workers in the country on one side and the largest individual steel manufacturers of the world on the other.

Upon one hand will be ranged the strength of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers of the United States, an organization 30,000 strong, with a balance in bank of \$250,000, and hundreds of thousands more in reserve, and on the other the prestige, power, and wealth of the Carnegie Steel Company, (Limited,) the new title of the associated interests of the Carnegie firms, with a capital of \$25,000,000. Broadly, the question will involve the right of capital to dictate terms to labor, and the recognized privilege of labor to obtain through organization the highest remuneration for its services.

More specifically, the struggle will be one against a reduction in wages of 30 per cent by 3,500 workers and an attempt on the part of The Carnegie Steel Company to make such working terms as it deems applicable to the present condition of the steel business and the mechanical improvements effected in the process of manufacture.

This condition of affairs has arisen out of the expiration of a three years' sliding scale of wages in operation at the Homestead Works of the company and the action of the company in substituting another with marked reductions in rates. . . .

In anticipation of the expiration of the three years' scale next Thursday, the Carnegie Steel Company formulated a schedule of rates to operate from July 1 next to the first of January, 1894. The minimum basis has been changed from \$25 to \$22, and reductions which average 30 per cent have been made on the rates for the various kinds of employment. The workers on the other side presented the company with a scale which differed slightly from the current one. . . . The company had previously fixed the 24 [of June] as the last day open to the workers for accepting the scale as an organized body. After that date the men were to be treated with only as individuals. . . .

That the Carnegie Steel Company is thoroughly in earnest in its position is amply shown by the nature of the preparations made to sustain it. If it cannot make terms with its present employees it will employ outsiders. As in 1889, this will be resisted by the old hands, and the company has so anticipated. . . . Around the entire plant has been placed within the week a palisading [fence] nine feet high, topped with three strands of barbed wire. Even those will be charged with electricity to prevent any possibility of invasion.

Source: "A Mighty Struggle Ahead." New York Times. 27 Jun 1892, p1.

## ***The Homestead Works Strike of 1892***

### **Document #3: HOMESTEAD CONTEST (1892)**

#### **Workmen Hold a Mass Meeting at the Opera House. THE COMPANY DENOUNCED For Violating the Contract in Suspending Operations**

The closing down of the mills at Homestead last night has made a noticeable difference in the complexion of affairs. It now looks as if no more business would be done in the mills for an indefinite period. Unless something unforeseen occurs it will probably be months before the mammoth works of the Carnegie Steel company will resume. What may transpire in the meantime can only be conjectured. Every means possible will be used to preserve peace, and this end is desired by both the mill workers and the Carnegie company. The Amalgamated association has sworn in 20 extra men to do police duty without pay, and the company has added a number of watchmen to protect the property. It is thought the latter are well armed and will keep a sharp lookout day and night.

The trains are being watched by committees of the association and there are men stationed all over the country at manufacturing points to inform the organization here should any gang of workmen board the train for Homestead. Representatives of the Amalgamated association in other places make it their business to see when a representative of the company makes his appearance to gather up new men to take the place of the workmen in the Homestead mills. If a body of men can be secured the association will see that it is composed largely of Amalgamated men who will use their influence on the journey here to dissuade the men from attempting to go to work.

All hopes of a peaceful solution have been abandoned by the men. To-day groups of mill workers stand about on the street corners discussing the situation and in readiness to assist the reception committees at the different railroad stations in the borough. . .

Source: "Homestead Contest." Pittsburgh Press. 30 Jun 1892, p1.

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### **Document #4: HARRISON IS MAD, (1892)**

#### **Realizes the Fact That the Ironworkers' Strike Will Hurt Him. HE WILL APPEAL TO CARNEGIE**

Washington, July 3.—The President and his managers are said, on reliable authority, to wish Pennsylvania and its political bosses and iron barons were in Hades [sic]. The State has been a constant thorn in Harrison's side ever since he came to the White House, and now at the opening of the new campaign it is prodding him deeper than ever when he can least endure it. In the midst of his struggle to [become the Republican nominee] . . . the great iron lockout arises to expose to workmen the shameless mockery of protection and demolish the arguments built on the McKinley [protectionist tariff] bill.

The President himself is said to be too busy in trying to devise schemes to mollify [leading Republican leaders other than to curse] the labor troubles which involve the welfare of hundreds of thousands of working people, but he has told his managers to go ahead and try to do something to bring Carnegie and other iron barons to their senses, until after the election is over anyway, so that a great strike in the very industry which has profited most by protection will not give the lie direct to the claims made by rampant Republican campaign orators in behalf of the McKinley policy.

The story is current here that a sharp demand on the part of the administration will be made on Carnegie to come to terms with his men at once. It is said John C. New, consul general at London, has been cabled to see or communicate with Carnegie forthwith and inform him of what the President expects. . .

In all this talk, however, no sympathy is expressed for the workmen. The indignation of the politicians is aroused by the danger of defeat growing out of the labor troubles. It is plain they would not care a hair how much Carnegie ground down his men if he would select some other year to do it.

Source: "Harrison is Mad." Pittsburgh Press. 4 Jul 1882, p1.

## ***The Homestead Works Strike of 1892***

### **Document #5: "The Homestead Strike" (1892)**

*Workers sang during strikes not only to state their beliefs and goals, but because singing helped bind workers together. The Homestead strike of 1892 even had its own Homestead Strike Songster, and the story of the strike can be traced in the lyrics of the following four songs. "The Homestead Strike" explained that Carnegie's efforts to "lower our wages" was the basic cause of the strike.*

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Now, boys, we are out on strike, you can help us if you like,  
But you need not till I tell you what it's about.  
They want to lower our wages, we think it is not right;  
So for union's cause I want you all to shout.  
We will sing the union's praise while our voices we can raise,  
With noble Mr. Garland at our head,  
Hugh O'Donnell's good, that's true, we give him all the praise;  
We can't go wrong when by such men we're led.  
The struggle may be long, there's no one yet can say,  
But we'll take it as it comes for a little while;  
We will fight both night and day, for we're bound to win the day,  
And down this great steel king in grandest style.  
Now let us all stand firm and take things very cool,  
Then, you bet, we're sure to win this little strike;  
But if men don't mind and start and act a fool,  
That's sure to cause no end of care and strife.  
My advice to you is this, let us work with a cool head,  
And try and do the best thing in our power;  
We'll have the good will of all, which will bring us back our bread,  
And drive the demon Hunger from our door.  
Let us unite with heart and hand and spread the news through this broad land,  
We'll not give in until the company yield,  
And fight with might and main and travel hand in hand  
To win this strike or die upon the field.

Source: "The Homestead Strike": *The Homestead Strike Songster* (New York: n.d.). Reprinted in Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 243. [History Matters](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5322) <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5322>>.



## ***The Homestead Works Strike of 1892***

### **Document #6: The Homestead Letters (1892)**

*The following are a series of letters between Andrew Carnegie (who was vacationing in Europe) and Henry C. Frick regarding the upcoming labor dispute with the Amalgamated Association. Though in later interviews Carnegie expressed "surprise" at the confrontation, in fact he was in close contact with Frick during the entire proceedings.*

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May 4

Letter to Frick

"One thing we are all sure of: No contest will be entered in that will fail. It will be harder this time at Homestead.... On the other hand, your reputation will shorten it, so that I really do not believe it will be much of a struggle. We all approve of anything you do, not stopping short of approval of a contest. We are with you to the end."

June 10

Telegram to Frick

"Of course, you will be asked to confer, and I know you will decline all conferences, as you have taken your stand and have nothing more to say.... Of course you will win, and win easier than you suppose, owing to the present condition of the market."

July 7

Telegram to Frick

"Cable received. All anxiety gone since you stand firm. Never employ one of these rioters. Let grass grow over works. Must not fail now. You will win easily next trial."

November 18

Telegram from Frick at end of lockout

"Victory!"

November 21

Telegram from Frick

"Strike officially declared off yesterday. Our victory is now complete and most gratifying. Do not think we will ever have any serious labor trouble again.... Let the Amalgamated still exist and hold full sway at other people's mills. That is no concern of ours."

Source: "Strike at Homestead Mill: The Homestead Letters." The American Experience. 1999. PBS. 28 July 2008

<[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carnegie/sfeature/mh\\_letters.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carnegie/sfeature/mh_letters.html)>.

## *The Homestead Works Strike of 1892*

### **Document #7: MOB LAW AT HOMESTEAD (1892)**

**PROVOKED BY AN ATTACK OF PINKERTON DETECTIVES.**

**TEN MEN KILLED AND AT LEAST FIFTY WOUNDED.**

**FIERCE BATTLES FOUGHT AT THE STEEL WORKS -- THE DETECTIVES ATTEMPT TO LAND FROM BOATS AND ARE DRIVEN BACK AND HELD UNTIL THEY SURRENDER.**

PITTSBURG, July 6. -- Mob law has prevailed at Homestead to-day. The Carnegie Steel Works strikers, made desperate by the prospect of defeat, fought for twelve hours with an organized and disciplined force of 300 Pinkerton men, and at the end of that time gained a signal victory. The Pinkerton men surrendered, and before morning will be lodged in the Allegheny County Jail, where they will be held to a new charge of murder. The events of the day will rank as one of the most remarkable chapters in the history of labor riots.

It was shortly after midnight last night when word reached Homestead that two barges filled with Pinkerton men had left a point on the Ohio River, a few miles below Pittsburg, for Homestead, and that they would attempt to force their way into the mill before morning. The word was carried to Homestead at once, and before 2 o'clock 6,000 men, women, and children lined the river banks on the lookout for the Pinkertons.

The detectives had been rendezvoused some five or six miles below the city on the Ohio River, where two model barges had been prepared for them. These barges were of the best build, and were used in shipping iron rails down the river from the Carnegie mills at Braddock. . . .

Rifles were in the hands of the Pinkertons but not a man of the strikers fell back. The broad gang plank was run ashore. Eight Pinkerton men, walking abreast, stepped on its end. Only one man, a mill worker named William Foy, moved out to oppose them. There was a puff from the barrel of a Winchester, a sharp report, and Foy fell dead in his tracks. Instantly the Pinkertons were made to pay for their work. Every man of the first rank was shot down. Two fell into the water and were heard of no more. . . .

From the first attack until noon the battle was continuous. When the Pinkertons failed to get into the mill the first time they made the attempt, the day was lost for them, but they did not seem to realize it. . . .

President Frick of the Carnegie Steel Company says he will never yield to the workmen, and the fight will go right on.

**THE SURRENDER.**

Toward dusk efforts were made again to burn the boats, and they would doubtless have succeeded had it not been for the interposition of the leading officers of the Amalgamated Association, who went to the scene of the war in the afternoon. Through their efforts it was agreed to allow the detective to surrender. . . They guaranteed safe conduct for the detectives provided they left their arms and ammunition behind and agreed to abandon the place under guard. The detectives accepted the terms, some of the men saying that it was the first time they had ever submitted to such a humiliating surrender.

Source: "Mob Law At Homestead." New York Times. 7 Jul 1882, p. 1.