

Navigations: A First-Year College Composite

Volume 3
Issue 1 *Activism*

Article 6

4-12-2019

From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: Reading about Labor in the United States

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Recommended Citation

Deme, Mohammad; Thomas, Qavonte; and Walker, Andre (2019) "From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: Reading about Labor in the United States," *Navigations: A First-Year College Composite*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/navigations/vol3/iss1/6>

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SCOPE

From The Folks Who Brought You The Weekend discusses the ignition of America's labor forces, starting in 1620, when the first slaves began to arrive in America to the high-tech workers of Silicon Valley today. The book illustrates the complex relationships between gender, ethnicity, race and immigration, explaining how each of these factors significantly impacted and reshaped labor in America.

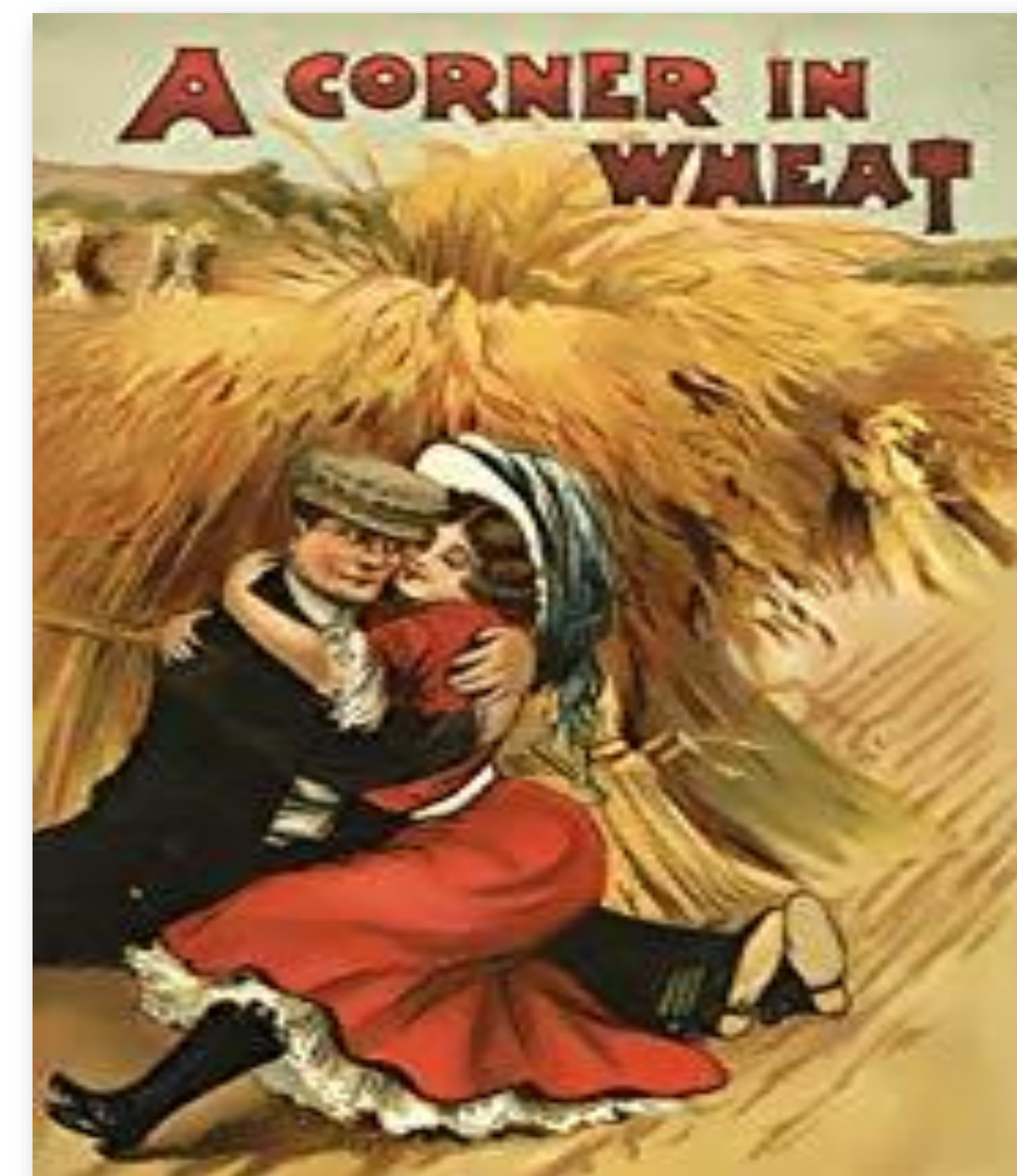
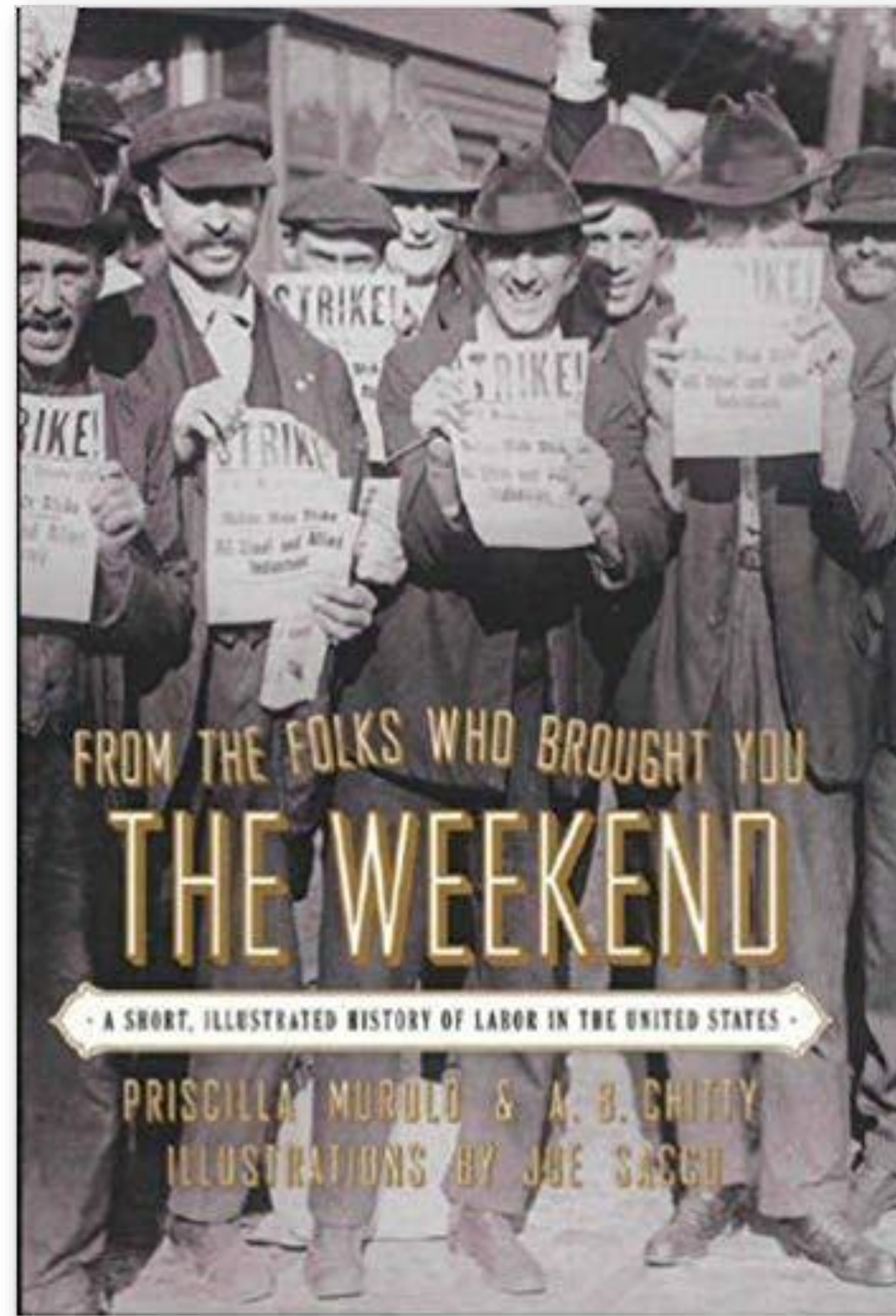
The authors Priscilla Murolo & A.B. Chitty challenge popular misconceptions about slavery in the New Republic (p.52), monopolies' political influence during the Gilded Age (p.110), and the rise of progressivism in the late 19th century (p.145) and much more by presenting the little-known facts of American Labor.

THESIS & CLAIMS

Murolo et.al. argues that many people seldom know the history of American labor and take the tremendous sacrifices and efforts of the working class for granted from simple things such as mandatory breaks to minimum wage. The book demonstrates how and why workers needed to establish their own presence in democracy to make a change for themselves and allow their voices to be heard.

Throughout history, the lower class was taken advantage of by the elites and the government often sided with big business. As the working class continued to use strikes and boycotts to fight for higher wages and improved working conditions, their bosses staged lock-outs and brought in replacement workers known as scabs, for example, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877.(p.108)

To battle political corruption, workers shaped countless organizations such as political parties (e.g. Democratic) to convey their message. They started reform movements (e.g. Populism), and numerous labor unions were formed to fight back against unfair practices. (e.g. Knights of Labor)



RELEVANCE

This book is relevant to the class in many ways, it provides a brief synopsis of many course themes we have discussed in class such as "The Titans", a period where greedy, corrupt industrialists, bankers and politicians enjoyed extraordinary wealth at the expense of the working class. The Immigrants", the arrival & exploitation of foreign laborers and "The Progressives", an era of major reform to tame the plight of the Gilded Age. Murolo et al. gave us a better historical context and allowed us to observe different views on this topic that are seldom covered in U.S. history courses.

"A Corner in Wheat (1909)", by D.W. Griffith was a liberal short film that targeted the wealthy and resonated among the lower class. This film was an overall interpretation of the Gilded Age, in which a greedy tycoon gained complete control of the wheat industry and raises the price causing the lower class to suffer while he profits ultimately leading to his demise.

We also found this book to be relevant to our future because one day we all will be a worker and this understanding of history allows us to make a stand for our rights as workers when we are treated unfairly, even with issues relevant today in the workplace such as sexual harassment and unequal pay regarding gender or race.

CONCLUSION

Murolo et al attempts to give a more nuanced history of labor ranging, arguing the history of American labor is a story of constant struggle, whether it's against enslavement, impoverishment or repression. Many examples such as the hours and conditions of labor, regulation of health and safety, and social welfare, show that the results of the working class is organized to advance their own common interests. However, it seemed as if these advances were in vein due to these inhumane conditions returning back into American labor. Since then, conditions have changed for the better, but the overall structure of American society seized to remain influenced. However, the pursuit of a better lifestyle and conditions will always arise as long as injustice is existing.