

6.5-A DBQ Documents

Question: Evaluate the struggles experienced by organized labor in improving the conditions of workers from 1875 to 1900.

Document 1: W.E.B. Du Bois, "Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880," Originally Published 1935.

The new labor that came to the United States, while it was poor, used to oppression and accustomed to lower standards of living, was not willing, after it reached America, to regard itself as a permanent laboring class and it is in light of this fact that the labor movement amongst white Americans must be studied. [. . .] They wanted to become capitalists; and they found that chance threatened by the competition of a working class whose status at the bottom of the economic structure seemed permanent and inescapable. [. . .] For the immediate available jobs, the Irish particularly competed and employers [. . .] did not wish to increase the number of Negro workers, so long as the foreigners worked just as cheaply. The foreigners in turn blamed blacks for the cheap price of labor.

Document 2: "The Parasites of Labor," Letter to the Editor, Published in the *New York Times*, 1883

The trades-union can sympathize with the effort of any trades-union to diminish the production of the country or to restrict the industry of any man willing to work. [. . .] The great majority of Americans have fortunately no class feeling which induces them to take sides in labor troubles according to the class to which they belong. [. . .] The same feeling which enlists them against greedy, extortionate, and tyrannical employers enlists them also against greedy, unambitious and short-sided workmen.

Document 3: Western Union Telegraph Employee Contract, 1883

I, [name] of [city] in consideration of my present reemployment by the Western Union Telegraph Co. hereby promise and agree to and with the said company that I will forthwith abandon any and all membership, connection or affiliation with any organization or society, whether secret or open, which in anywise attempts to regulate the conditions of my services or the payment thereof while in the employment now undertaken. I hereby further agree that I will, while in the employ of said company, render good and faithful service to the best of my ability, and will not in anywise renew or re-enter upon any relations or membership whatsoever in or with any such organizations or society. Dated 1883. Signed Address (Seal)