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Reader Response 10

The significance of the Chapter 11 title in A People’s History, “Robber Barons and Rebels” is that during this time, the late 19th century, strikes and workers’ riots and unions were just starting to arise. I think the title is a separation of the different types of people during this strange time. It represents the different social classes. The robbers are the rich and upper class, because they are constantly shown to be using the poorer classes for their own personal gain. By using their work, and paying them less than their work’s worth, is practically the rich robbing them. The way capitalism is made, the rich will always profit off the poorer class’ work. The rich hire the poor to do their work and make money for them, in exchange for a small portion of that money. So by paying the poor for their jobs, the rich are actually gaining more money than they’re spending for their workers. The poor do their jobs and make a substantial amount of money for their employers, while being paid less than they made for their employer. For the rich, there is a net gain in money, while the poor receive a net loss in money. This is why the rich will get richer, as the poor get poorer. This net gain for the rich and upper class at the expense of the net loss of the poorer classes is why the rich are the robbers. The Baron in the title is the middle class. The definition of Baron is “a member of the lowest order of the British nobility.” This is saying that the Barons are the lowest of the rich upper class. On a scale, this would the richer middle class. The class system is like a scale in the sense that there are richer upper classes, and lower upper classes. This applies to all classes, and the Baron would be a part of the richer middle class. The rebels would be the people who are a part of a resistance, so in this case, it would be the lower middle class and the entirety of the lower class. Collectively, we can label them as the working class, who rebelled against the unfair working conditions.

These chapters illustrate many ways in which the government benefited the wealthy. This is because of the above reasons about simply how the entire concept of Capitalism is biased positively towards the upper and rich classes. This is why the government still benefits the wealthy today. The rich will always get richer, as the poor get poorer. This will always remain true as long as we have Capitalism in America. The way the Supreme Court was doing its bit for the ruling elite was through their maneuvering of the law to protect the rich from any of the consequences of their illegal ways. The Supreme Court was not neutral in the sense between the rich and poor, as the majority of the Supreme Court came from wealthy backgrounds, and for the few who were not, were now rich due to their position in the Supreme Court. The Sherman Act is an act that prevents monopoly and regulates competition among enterprises. In U.S. v. E. C. Knight Co, they declared that a monopoly of sugar refinement was not a monopoly of commerce, but a monopoly in manufacturing. Congress cannot regulate monopolies in manufacturing; this became a leeway for the rich and upper class companies. I think that this decision was very biased because it was decision where they saw the company as a different title, but the same duty. All they did was reword the title to help the E.C Knight Co get away with their monopoly. The congress tried to help the working class through their legislation, but the Supreme Court had overruled over 230 state laws regarding the regulation of corporations. The Supreme Court’s reason as to why the Courts did this was because the many state laws that were passed by the legislative branch were an intrusion to the federal laws. The state laws during this time could not interfere or say opposing ideas to the federal laws, as all the laws had to be aligned correctly and work together.

During this industrial period, it was important for working-class children to learn “obedience to authority.” The reason why this was so important was because the government and the upper class wanted to prevent any more workers’ strikes or riots. They also wanted to make an easier worker class to use. Already they were using the working class to make a profit off of their work and underpay the workers. With a more “obedient” working class, they can make even worse working conditions and underpay them even more to maximize their profits, all without any strikes or riots. This type of thinking is still present in today’s time. We are required to listen to every single adult as a kid, or face major consequences. The term of “talking back” is a way of saying that the child is not being obedient enough for the adult’s preference. This method still being used today is also used for when the children grow up to listen to their employers without complaints, while they could be treated better. For example, children are taught to continuously do their homework throughout their entire educational career to get used to doing paper work for their employers. At first the children complain, but as they repeatedly do it for the first majority of their life, they learn to simply do it without complaints. This is teaching the children to do work compliantly for the benefits of their future employers, who are a part of the upper class. I agree with both of the statements from both Howard Zinn and Doris Lessing. Zinn is saying that everyone grows up compliant to society until one moment; they see a flaw in the system. He then goes on to say that we are responsible to show others exactly this flaw, so society can fix it. Doris Lessing is saying that the education system should be explicit with their system and inform the children that the entire education system is based off outdated thoughts of the predecessors of the system, used to train children for a world of obedience to the upper class.

Wage Slavery is a concept in which the ratio of work to wage reaches something very similar to real slavery. Real slavery is a labor amount of work for no pay, whereas wage slavery is a specific type and amount of work (either very difficult or very time consuming amount) for little pay. Wage slavery is the concept of simply working way too hard for your money. If your job is make a product that profits 500 dollars to your employer, but only pays you a single dollar, then that is wage slavery. Wage slavery is also characterized as poor working conditions as well. The entries in this chapter very much reinforce the idea of wage slavery. The way Capitalism supports the idea that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. It also supports the idea of wage slavery which is a way for the rich to simply maximize their profits, all at the expense of the poorer classes’ lives and way of living. There are two major differences in white wage slavery and black wage slavery. One of the differences is the wage amount. Usually, despite both still being underpaid, white people will still make more than black people, even when doing the same work and job. For example, a white person who makes 5 dollars an hour will have a black counterpart who will make only 4 dollars an hour. Another difference between white and black wage slavery are the working conditions. White people will receive better working conditions and black people will receive worse working conditions. White people usually have break rooms and certain bonuses along with scheduled breaks while the rich treat black people with none of these accommodates. The reason towards these differences in the wage slaveries is that black people are discriminated against time in and time out. As well as black people are more “obedient” due to their long line of discrimination and deal with injustices. White people are more likely to produce strikes and riots as they are unused to the idea of discrimination, according to history.

During the Gilded Age, it was dangerous to belong to a union. To belong to a union meant to go against your employer and risk everything on the line. If you joined a union, there was no guarantee that you would be able to put food on the table, because if you’re not working, you’re not getting paid. Also, if you joined a union, there was also no guarantee that you would ever get a job again, because after that, employers will never want to employ a person who is disobedient or uncompliant to the societal norms of the work force. Lastly, when belonging to a union, there are strikes that need to be done to put a point across. However, these strikes can be very violent and can and has resulted in very deadly massacres. There was the Lattimer Massacre, where nineteen unarmed immigrant coal miners who had recently joined a union were gunned down. The government couldn’t help the poorer classes with wages, benefits, or better working conditions because of the privately own corporations. Due them being privately owned, the companies could determine the wages and the working conditions. Also, the government didn’t want to help because they were biased towards the upper class as many of them fell into this category. A welfare state is a system whereby the government undertakes to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, especially those in financial or social need, by means of grants, pensions, and other benefits. The foundations for the modern welfare state in the US were laid by the New Deal programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The way corporations benefitted from the welfare states was that the government paid companies a significant amount of money to fund these benefits and better working conditions. The corporations were able to avoid strikes and riots, without having to lose their own money. The demands of the strikes and riots were also met through these welfare states, in which both sides of the social classes were complacent.

Eugene Debs became a socialist because he found and realized the major flaws of Capitalism, and found a better way of dealing with the economy. What Debs meant when he wrote, “Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization” is that money and the exchange of it results in an unequal amount of money from each side of the social class spectrum. A basis of civilization is how the civilization is run. In this case, it is run by money and every aspect in day to day life needs the use of money. The basis of civilization today is to go to school to get a good job and make as much money as you can for either yourself or your family. The basis of civilization in my opinion should be as it is now. It promotes competitiveness and has a chance of living a very nice life. One way to open opportunities is through schooling, so it becomes very possible for people on the lower end of the social class scale, to move up to middle or upper class by becoming a professional in a specific area. For Deb’s strike against the government and their capitalistic ways, he was put in prison for six months, where he told the court "It seems to me that if it were not for resistance to degrading conditions, the tendency of our whole civilization would be downward; after a while we would reach the point where there would be no resistance, and slavery would come." He told the court that he was not a socialist, however, whilst in prison, he studied socialism and talked to other fellow socialists. When he came out of prison after his six month term, he ended up writing in the Railroad Times “The issue is Socialism versus Capitalism. I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization. The time has come to regenerate society-we are on the eve of a universal change.” After his prison sentence, he learned of the flaws of the capitalistic state and found a fairer alternative, which was socialism.

Howard Zinn mentions a “betrayal of the former slaves by the national administration in 1877.” This betrayal was letter from the superintendent of Putnam Colored Farmers’ Alliance requesting for equal rights for colored people and a chance to relieve black and white tensions. The Putnam Colored Farmers’ Alliance’s motto was “Equal Rights for all, Special Privileges to none.” This was a way of saying they wanted equal rights and to be treated like everyone else in society. The response to this betrayal was major acts of violence in both the south and north parts of the United States. Within the five decades, over five thousand blacks were victims of lynch mobs, while the local and national governments didn’t do anything to stop it. The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century activities of the Ku Klux Klan were acts of terrorism towards the black race. They killed and kidnapped so many black people, that it instilled fear and terrors of all ages of the black race. However, as discrimination to the black people was a very common act, the governments did not label this as terrorism, but simply as a social norm. Lynching was very common to black people during this era. Lynching is the act of a mob killing someone by hanging them for an alleged offense without a legal trial. Lynching was made very popular during this time because this was the time where the blacks were asking for equal rights, and instead got a response in violence. White people had thought that if the black people couldn’t be there slaves, then why have them. They hated the idea of not having free labor, so this resulted in the discrimination and lynching of them. Unfortunately, lynching still happens today. They’re not as popular as it was back in the 1880-1920’s, but it still happens because racism still lives on in the United States. Racism justified these terrorist acts. People have said that black people are rapists or that they’re criminals, despite there not being any evident background support.

Urban whites and blacks, along with their rural counterparts, rural whites and blacks, shared a common voice, but shared a few differences. Urban whites and urban blacks protested for better wages and better working conditions. The workers of the urban cities asked for higher wages and better working conditions. They also asked to not be replaced by machines during this industrial age. Rural whites and rural blacks called for equal rights and higher wages. The farmers of rural lands were making little revenue at all from all of their sold produce. To keep prices cheap for the urban cities, they paid the farmers less of the money. Both share a voice of higher wages, but only the urban whites and blacks were in fear of unemployment by machines. The reason as to why rural men and women joined the Farmers’ Alliance was to obtain a decent enough wage to survive in the rural areas. With all the banks prospering and the industrial age in full effect, the farmers too demanded higher wages. The wages they were receiving is as close to wage slavery as real slavery gets. The demands to the corporate owners from unions and the working people were higher wages, or at least keeping a higher percentage of the revenue from the selling of the produce. The tactics workers and unions used to try to better their working con­ditions and living wages were strikes and collective bargaining. They had strikes to stop all production and this would lead into less food or different produce for the distribution centers. These strikes forced the companies to give in because finding another farm to farm all the production would be too difficult and costly. They also collectively bargained to find a middle ground. They would try to raise their wages to the maximum or at least anywhere higher. In the end, the farmers still hardly ever received any accurate or deserving amount due to the capital greed.

Many things happened after large numbers of new immigrants arrived from Southern and Eastern Europe that would alter urban life and work patterns in the United States. For one thing, many of these immigrants were willing to work for less and with worse working conditions. This did not help many of the worker strikes or unions. Many actually lost their jobs from this. Along with the fast rate of immigrants coming in the United States, many of the animosities came along with that, such as the conflict between the Irish and the Jewish people. I believe that the Irish were one of the more successful immigrant groups due to their ability to find a non-labor job. Many of them got jobs as policemen and lived very stable lives. An immigrant group who weren’t as successful were the Chinese immigrants. They worked on the railroad track system. Many of them worked day in and day out. They were overworked so much, a large number of them ended up dyeing from overworking so hard. The voices in this Chapter tell us that poverty is happening because corporations and the government refuse to help or pay the working class anything that would help them out of poverty. They’re stuck in poverty, and when they ask for higher wages, they are refused and have to resort to strikes and unions, or live in poverty. So many of these factors are out any one individual’s hands. People cannot point individual blame on poverty when the whole system of Capitalism is the problem as to why the poorer will never get rich, but get poorer. Henry George, a radical economist, believes that a way to rid the United States of poverty is to tax land because his interpretation on the basis of civilization is land. He believes that a single tax on land “would bring enough revenue to solve the problem of poverty and equalize wealth in the nation.”