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History

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### Homework 4 Reading Response

In the chapter “Time of Chaos, 1865-1897” of *Industrialism and the American Worker: 1865-1920*, Melvyn Dubofsky examines the changing relationship between the working class and industrialists in the development of the US as an industrial society during the Gilded Age. Specifically, he asserts that this was a period of chaos for the working class, as their relationship with industrialists changed from a balance of power to industrialists monopolizing industry and exploiting workers for their own advantage. He argues that this created a pattern of conflict between industrialists and workers—and therefore in the growth of the US’s labor movement—as workers retaliated against industrialists’ monopolization and exploitation while industrialists used governmental power to destroy their resistance. Dubofsky himself states that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “nowhere was the chaos of the times more evident than in the changing relationship between American workers and their employers” and that “workers fought some of the most violent industrial conflicts in American history.”<sup>1</sup> He explains that the relationship between workers and industrialists evolved because industrialists pushed workers from communities centered around laborers and local interactions (~~a balanced relationship~~) into a mechanical work environment where industrialists dictated pay rate and working conditions. As a result, workers retaliated by forming labor unions and striking—some examples of this being the Long Strike, the 1877 railroad strikes, the 1886 Haymarket Affair, the 1892 Homestead and

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<sup>1</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, “Time of Chaos, 1865-1897,” in *Industrialism and the American Worker: 1865-1920* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1994), 1, 2.

Coeur d'Alene conflicts, and the 1894 Pullman railroad boycott. Industrialists in turn used government military power as well as inconsistent application of the law to destroy workers' resistance and further establish their power ~~in their dynamic~~. Dubofsky also explains that industrialists' rise in power marked a shift from the previous traditional, republican values around labor to bureaucratic principles favoring the industrialist. In sum, Dubofsky's view is that the changing power dynamic between the industrialist and worker resulted in a pattern of conflict and repression between the two groups and in the growth of the US's labor movement during the Gilded Age.

Dubofsky's overall argument is quite effective **because he considers contradictions as well as acknowledges previous perspectives** ~~made ab~~ about labor during the Gilded Age before stating his own argument. ~~An instance of this is when he is making his claim about what truly~~ occurred in the conflict of the anthracite miners in Pennsylvania. He writes that "Most older narratives of the conflict in the anthracite region tended to be simplistic [...] During the last two decades, however, a subtler and more realistic history... has emerged."<sup>2</sup> Here, Dubofsky's acknowledgement of the "popular" perspective of what happened in the conflict helps the effectiveness of his argument because it supports his reliability as an author. By first recognizing the more 'simplistic' arguments made by others, Dubofsky enters the conversation in a way that shows his understanding of other arguments—**suggesting that his own addition to the conversation will be well-informed and credible**. Another example of when Dubofsky's argument effective is when he acknowledges contradiction with the Lockean consensus theory. He recognizes a possible contradiction it has with his argument about the pattern of conflict, then defends his own argument against it—again showing how his argument is effective. After

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<sup>2</sup> Dubofsky, 5.

arguing that the consensus has some validity, he asks how one can “explain the simultaneous existence of consensus and conflict.”<sup>3</sup> He answers this question himself by stating that discussions around consensus in US history usually discuss in very high levels of abstraction and typically detail how things would work in ideal situations, while most people live in the real world in which small, everyday events influence attitudes just as much as abstract principles.<sup>4</sup> Dubofsky validates his credibility himself simply by including the consensus, acknowledging that it does have some truth to it, and stating that it does indeed conflict with his own main argument. Similarly to the last example, this suggests that **he is well-informed** and that his argument is effective enough to defend itself against a contradiction with another argument that Dubofsky admits does have some validity. Overall, Dubofsky either acknowledging other perspectives or acknowledging contradictions with other perspectives before providing his own addition to the topic makes his argument fairly effective. 

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<sup>3</sup> Dubofsky, 17.

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