

Sources of Agrarian Discontent During the Gilded Age

Document A

Source: Frank Norris, *The Octopus* (1901)

For a moment Dyke was confused. Then swiftly the matter became clear in his mind. The Railroad had raised the rate on hops from two cents to five.

All his calculations as to a profit on his little investment he had based on a freight rate of two cents a pound. He was under contract to deliver his crop. He could not draw back. The new rate ate up every cent of his gains. He stood there ruined.

"Why, what do you mean?" he burst out. "You promised me a rate of two cents and I went ahead with my business with that understanding....."

"The rate is five cents." declared the clerk doggedly.

"Well that ruins me," shouted Dyke. "Do you understand, I won't make fifty cents. Make? Why, will owe -I'll be--be-That ruins me, do you understand?"

The other raised a shoulder.

"We don't force you to ship. You can do as you like. The rate is five cents."

"Well-but-You told me-you promised me a two-cent rate."

.... Dyke stared in blank astonishment.....

". . . Look here. What's your basis of applying freight rates, anyhow?" he suddenly vociferated with furious sarcasm.....

S. Behnman emphasized each word of his reply with a tap of one forefinger on the counter before him.

"All-the-traffic-will-bear."

Document B

Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States*

Agricultural Prices in Dollars per Unit, 1865-1900

Year	Wheat		Cotton		Corn	
	Price per bushel	Millions of Bushels Produced	Price per pound	1,000 Bales Produced	Price per bushel	Millions of bushels produced
1865	2.16	NA	.83	2,094	NA	NA
1870	1.04	254	.24	4,352	.52	1,125
1875	1.01	314	.15	4,631	.42	1,450
1880	.95	502	.12	6,606	.39	1,707
1885	.77	400	.11	6,576	.32	2,058
1890	.84	449	.11	8,653	.50	1,650
1895	.51	542	.07	7,162	.25	2,535
1900	.62	599	.10	10,124	.35	2,662

Document C

Source: Letter from Susan Orcutt (in Kansas) to Lorenzo D. Lewelling, June 29, 1894

I take my Pen In hand to let you know that we are Starving to death. It is Pretty hard to do without any thing to eat in this God for saken country we would have had Plenty to Eat if the hail hadent cut our rye down and ruined our corn and Potatoes. I had the Prettiest Garden that you Ever seen and the hail ruined It and I have nothing to look at my Husband went away to find work and came home last night and told me that we would have to Starve he has bin in ten countys and did not Get no work. It is Pretty hard for a woman to do with any thing to Eat.

Document D

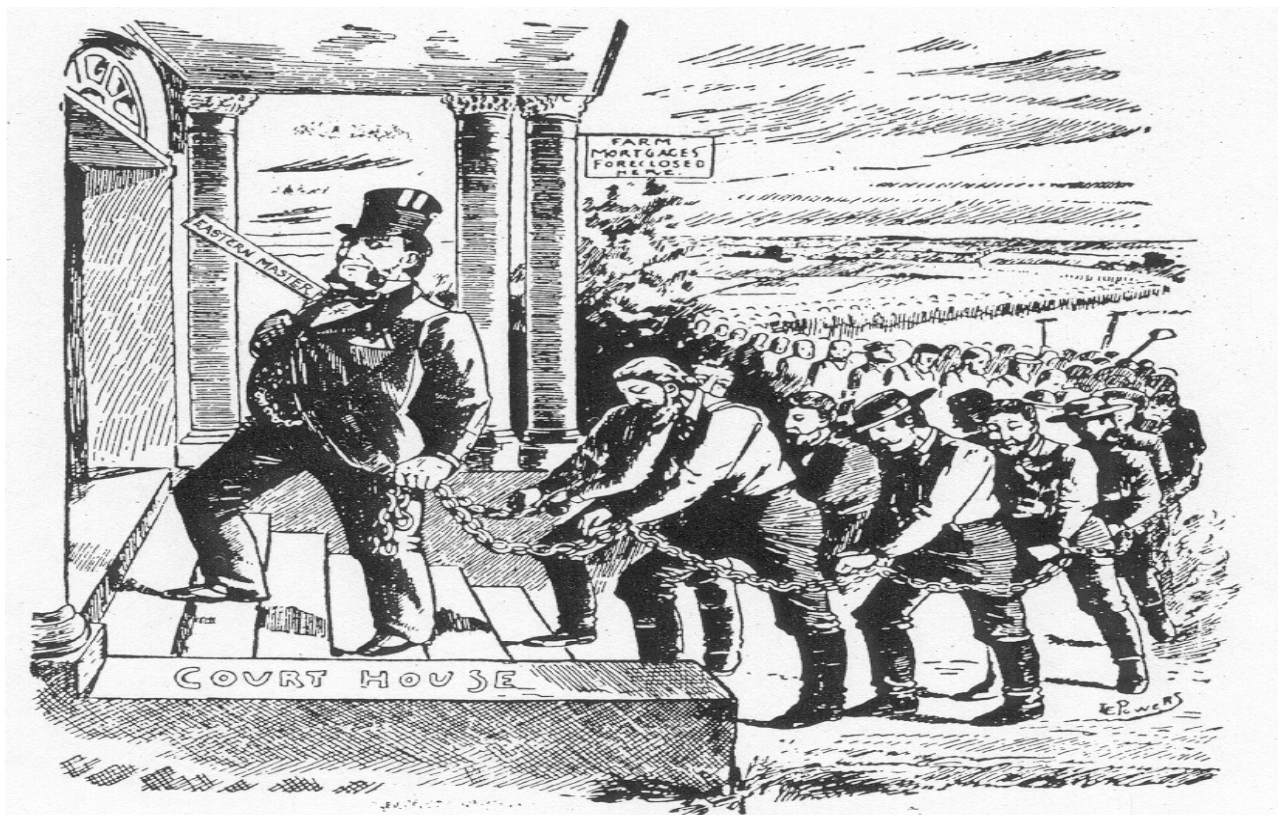
Source: Speech by Mary Elizabeth Lease, 1892

Money rules ... The parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us. We were told two years ago to go to work and raise a big crop that was all we needed. We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shone, nature smiled, and we raised the big crop that they told us to; and what came of it? Eight-cent corn, ten-cent oats, two-cent beef, and no price at all for butter and eggs – that's what came of it.

Then the politicians said we suffered from overproduction. Overproduction, when 10,000 little children, so statistics tell us, starve to death every year in the United States.

Document E

Source: *The Farmer's Voice*, a Chicago newspaper [late 1880s, early 1890s]



Designed and Engraved expressly for "The Farmer's Voice."

THE EASTERN MASTER AND HIS WESTERN SLAVES