

AN ADDED OBJECTION: THE USE OF BLACKS IN THE
COAL MINES OF WASHINGTON, 1880-1896

by

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ABSTRACT

Although not as important as timber, the coal mining industry did play a significant role in Washington's economic development of the 1880's. But coal mining was not an easy business in which to make a profit. The product itself was mediocre; costs were high, and competition was stiff. The leading independent coal company, the Oregon Improvement Company (OIC), suffered from continual financial problems and was hampered by poor management. To reduce costs the OIC emphasized the factor of production that appeared to be easiest to control -- labor. Like all Washington coal operators, the OIC officers were opposed to labor organizations, which they believed both increased costs and interfered with a company's right to conduct its business.

The nature of coal mining and the structure of mining towns made conflict almost inevitable between a company and its employees. The mine workers quickly learned that organization was not only essential to protect their interests in an irregular and dangerous industry, but also to counteract the overwhelming influence of the company. When Knights of Labor organizers appeared in Washington in the early 1880's, they were enthusiastically received by the mine workers, and local assemblies of the Knights were established throughout Washington's mining regions.

A company like the OIC wanted to mine coal efficiently and economically without any interference from employees or

labor organizations. In order to inhibit the influence of organized labor the OIC encouraged faction among its employees, with the intent of keeping the workers divided and quarreling among themselves. To the OIC officers it appeared that the workers could be permanently divided along racial lines. Their experience with placing low-paid Chinese workers in the mines had shown them that their white employees completely accepted the prevailing racial stereotypes. Not only were the mine workers opposed to Chinese in the mines, they became leaders in the movement to expel the Chinese from Washington. Racial animosity and a fear of cheap labor prevented the mine workers from seeing what they had in common as workers with the Chinese. In this sense the Chinese laid the groundwork for the far more successful use of blacks in the mines.

The first black mine workers in Washington were imported from the Midwest in 1888 by the Northern Pacific Coal Company. With the use of blacks the company broke a strike led by the Knights. In 1891 the OIC decided to follow the example of the Northern Pacific, and black workers were imported under contract to work in the OIC mines. With cheap black labor the OIC believed it could conduct its business more economically and suppress organized labor by encouraging racial hostility among the workers.

The OIC's use of blacks precipitated the complete defeat of union mine workers in Washington. A national tradition of anti-Negro prejudice enhanced by the West's more virulent racism, and the minimal participation of blacks in the developing labor

movement, all contributed to their successful use in the Washington mines. Racial animosity and hostility to cheap labor kept the blacks and whites divided. Initiated by the Knights, the retaliatory strike of the white mine workers failed, and mining unions disappeared from Washington for over a decade.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

The Coal Mining Economy and Labor In Washington	1
Notes to Chapter I	24

CHAPTER II

Coal Mining	29
Notes to Chapter II	50

CHAPTER III

Roslyn and the Nation	54
Notes to Chapter III	74

CHAPTER IV

The Defeat of the Mine Workers	78
Notes to Chapter IV	108

BIBLIOGRAPHY	112
--------------------	-----

APPENDIX	119
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LIST OF TABLES

TABLE I

Washington Coal Production 1875-1895 5

TABLE II

Points of Origin of Coal Shipped to San
Francisco, California, 1880-1895 6

TABLE III

Coal Mines of Washington, 1888 8

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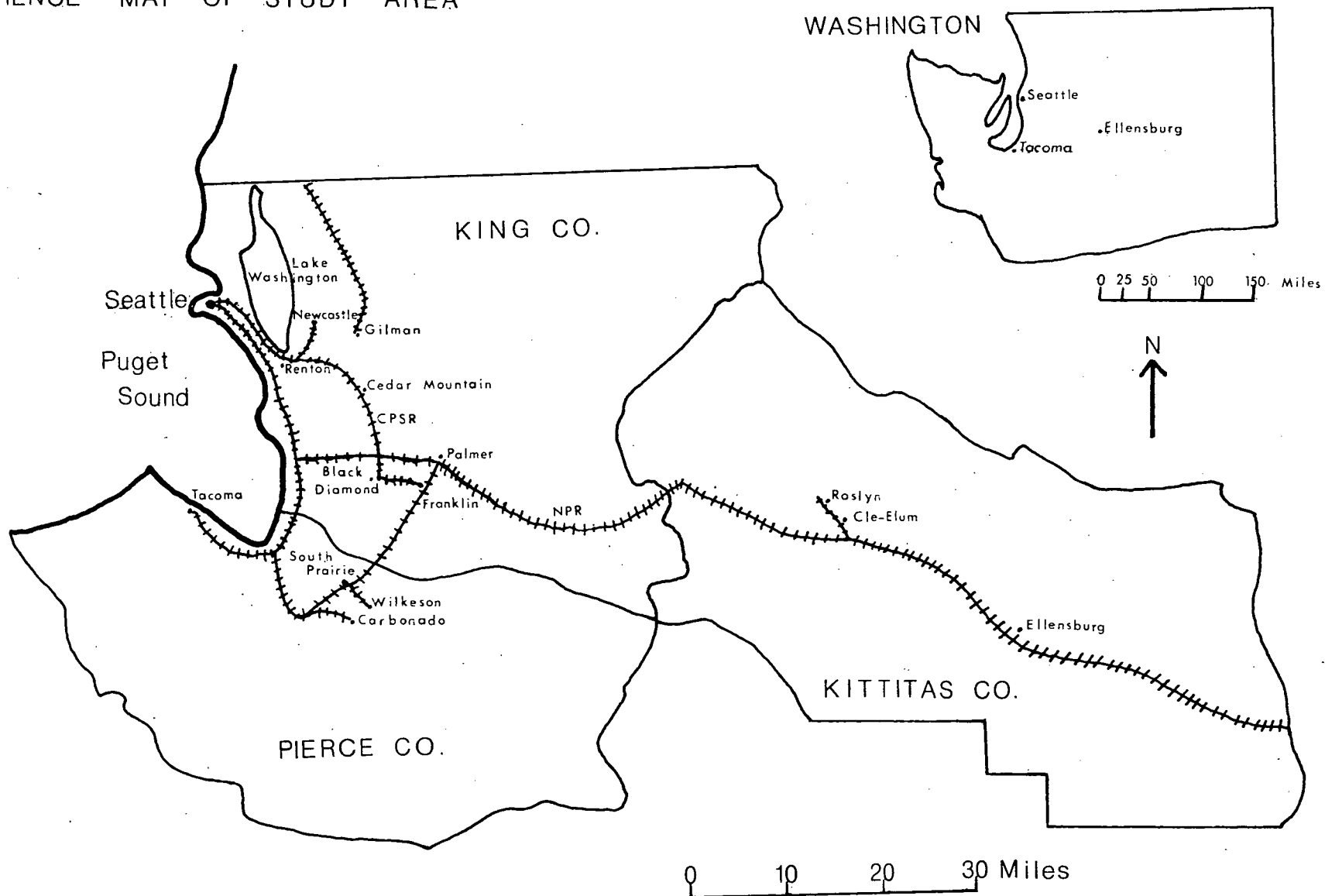
To Randall, Anna, and Andrea I can say little except, thanks. They were always there and that's what counted most of all.

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Since he too is always close by and never at a loss for something to say, I should let Huck Finn have the last words: "So there ain't nothing more to write about, and I'm rotten glad of it, because if I'd knowed what trouble it was ... I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more."

Robert Campbell

REFERENCE MAP OF STUDY AREA



THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR STRIKE

We're brave and gallant miner boys
That work in underground
For courage and good nature
None like us can be found
We work both late and early,
And get but little pay
To support our wives and children,
In free America

Here's to the Knights of Labor
That brave and gallant band
That Corbon and old Swigard
Is trying to disband
But stick and hang brave union men
We'll make them rue the day
They thought to break the K. of L.
In free America

If Satan took the blacklegs
I'm sure 't would be no sin
What peace and happiness 't would be
For us workingmen
Eight hours we'd have for labor
Eight hours we'd have for play
Eight hours we'd have for sleeping
In free America

-- Written in 1885 by John Hornby. From
Philip Foner, American Labor Songs of
the Nineteenth Century, p. 202.

They [the mine workers] seem to regard the introduction of negro labor in much the same light as that of the Chinese, and fear that it will embitter labor controversies by injecting race prejudice into them. Of course among workingmen generally the sentiment would be against imported men of whatever race, but here the color of the men seems to be an added objection.

-- Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 18 May 1891

CHAPTER I

THE COAL MINING ECONOMY AND
LABOR IN WASHINGTON

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the nature of disputes between Washington coal mining operators and their employees in the 1880's and early 1890's. The focus of this discussion is on the role of race and racial animosity in such disputes. Specifically I am interested in how the use of blacks in the mines contributed to the demise of mining unions. This chapter, which in part can be considered an introduction, attempts to answer three general questions. First, what were the characteristics of the coal mining industry and the coal mining companies? The latter part of this question deals mainly with the Oregon Improvement Company, upon which this study is based. Second, what was the position of organized labor in the mining industry? And third, how did the use of Chinese in the mines affect employer/employee relations and pave the way for the use of blacks?

Until the 1880's Washington played an insignificant part in the national economy. The local economy was based on timber, some mining, and the raising of wheat and hops. But with the decision of the Northern Pacific Railroad (NPR) to complete its road to the Puget Sound, which would link the Territory to the nation, Washington experienced a period of unprecedented development. The "boom" of the eighties was fueled by timber,

mining, railroads, streamship traffic and agriculture. As shown in the Appendix, between 1880 and 1890 the population of Washington increased by a factor of five, and Seattle grew from a quiet city of thirty-five hundred to a bustling one of over forty thousand. It should be noted, however, that this prosperity was marred by a depression from 1884-1886 which was a result of a financial panic in the East and high unemployment with the completion of the NPR in 1883.¹

It should also be noted that this discussion necessarily emphasizes coal mining while virtually ignoring the economically more significant timber industry. In 1880 one hundred and sixty million board feet were cut in Washington. A decade later timber production had surpassed one billion board feet per year. While the timber industry supported ten thousand men in 1890 and could boast a \$15,000,000 annual product, coal mining offered employment to fewer than three thousand men and could deliver less than 20% of the timber industry's annual product.²

Still, coal production was an important, if awkward part of Washington's but particularly Seattle's development. When Seattle was founded in 1852, there was little to distinguish it from other Puget Sound communities such as Olympia and Port Townsend. All were blessed with good harbors and access to timber. What did distinguish Seattle was its coal trade that began almost as soon as the town. The first coal in King County was discovered in 1853 by Dr. M. Bigelow on the Black River near Seattle. He opened a mine but had to abandon it because of high

transportation costs. In 1863 Phillip Lewis and Edward Richardson discovered coal on a creek later named Coal Creek, about twenty miles from Seattle. A mine was opened which eventually became part of the Newcastle mines. By 1875 Newcastle had replaced Bellingham Bay, Washington's oldest mine, as the leading coal producer, and practically all of Newcastle's coal went to Seattle. A few more coal mines were opened in the 1870's, but most opened during the boom of the eighties, and, as shown in Table I, coal production increased dramatically during this decade.³

Though important to the Washington economy, the coal mining industry was hampered by a number of factors. First, mining in Washington was expensive. The coal beds were in complex geological regions and successful mining required sophisticated techniques and skilled engineering. In addition, the best coal fields were in isolated areas which resulted in high transportation costs. Just as significant, Washington coal in general was low quality and because the coal contained a high percentage of foreign matter, it required expensive screening and cleaning before it could be sent to market.⁴

Finally, Washington coal faced stiff competition from other sources. Although much of the coal mined in Washington ended up on the docks of Seattle, the chief market was San Francisco. Outside of some local sources San Francisco received coal from four locations: Washington, British Columbia, Australia and Great Britain. Washington coal had the advantage of being close to San Francisco, but, more important, it was not subject to the imported-coal tariff of seventy-five cents per ton. Though

B.C. coal was subject to the tariff, it was generally superior in quality to Washington coal. Further, mining on Vancouver Island had lower production costs because coal was easier to mine; the collieries were located near the Nanaimo harbor which reduced transportation costs, and the operators benefitted from the use of cheap Chinese labor throughout the 1880's.

Australian and British coal was also usually superior to Washington coal. Coal from these areas was brought as ballast in otherwise empty wheat ships. When the wheat crop was good in the United States, Britain and Australia could often flood the market in San Francisco with relatively cheap coal.⁵

Although Washington coal was protected by a tariff, San Francisco purchased on the average less than a third of its coal from Washington (see Table II). British Columbia, Australia and Britain usually could offer superior coal at competitive prices. When there were labor problems abroad which closed the mines, or when wheat crops were poor which resulted in less ballast coal at San Francisco, then Washington coal sold well. In general, however, the Washington mines operated sporadically, most often in the fall and winter months when local demand increased.

With high fixed costs, an indifferent product, sporadic operation, and intense competition, coal mining was not an easy business in which to make a profit. In the long run, a successful mining company had to be on a sound financial basis, conduct its business with expertise, and keep costs to a minimum. The Oregon Improvement Company (OIC), the leading independent

TABLE I - WASHINGTON COAL PRODUCTION 1875-1895*

YEAR	TONS	YEAR	TONS
1875	99,568	1886	423,525
1876	110,346	1887	772,601
1877	120,196	1888	1,215,750
1878	131,660	1889	1,030,578
1879	142,666	1890	1,263,689
1880	145,015	1891	1,056,249
1881	196,000	1892	1,140,575
1882	177,340	1893	1,208,850
1883	244,990	1894	1,131,660
1884	166,936	1895	1,163,732
1885	380,250		

Source: U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Resources of the United States, 1900, p. 691.

* *Coal production figures for Washington are notoriously unreliable. Figures from newspapers, company records, mine inspector reports, and Mineral Resources might vary from each other by as much as $\pm 35.1\%$. By relying on the U.S.G.S. Mineral Resources, I have at least erred with consistency.*

TABLE II - POINTS OF ORIGIN OF COAL SHIPPED TO SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
1880-1895

YEAR	PERCENT COAL RECEIVED FROM				
	WASH.	B.C.	AUST.	BRITAIN	OTHERS
1880	18.9	25.9	9.2	10.2	35.9
1881	19.0	17.6	14.0	31.3	18.1
1882	27.0	17.9	18.0	21.4	15.7
1883	36.3	14.8	20.0	17.6	11.2
1884	31.6	29.5	19.3	13.2	6.4
1885	35.7	23.2	21.4	19.7	0
1886	25.3*	25.1	28.4	17.9	3.4
1887	45.4	21.9	13.5	9.1	10.2
1888	40.7	22.0	19.6	8.5	9.2
1889	32.7	31.3	25.6	3.8	6.5
1890**	33.9	36.7	16.7	3.1	9.8
1891**	22.0	38.3	18.9	11.8	9.0
1892**	24.0	34.8	19.7	14.8	6.7
1893**	29.0	37.8	13.7	11.5	8.1
1894**	25.9	42.3	13.9	11.5	6.4
1895**	24.6	39.4	16.3	12.4	7.3

** Includes all California ports

* Includes Coos Bay, Oregon

Sources: Calculated from U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Resources of the United States, 1882, pp. 97-98; 1883-84, p. 20; 1885, p. 15; 1886, p. 242; 1887, p. 211; 1888, p. 225; 1889-90, p. 168; 1891, p. 203; 1900, p. 354.

coal mining company in Washington in the 1880's, ultimately could not achieve these ends, and during its sixteen years of operation the OIC went into receivership twice and collapsed after the Panic of 1893.

The Oregon Improvement Company was established by German financial wizard Henry Villard and six Oregon capitalists in October 1880. Villard had organized a number of Pacific Northwest companies, and he envisioned the OIC as a large holding company dominating the transportation and coal market in the Northwest. Under OIC control Villard placed four small railroads, a steamship company, and the Newcastle coal mines, which he also purchased in 1880.⁶

Particularly with mining, the future looked profitable for the OIC in the beginning. In 1883 the output from Newcastle accounted for nearly 80% of the coal produced in Washington, and from this revenue the OIC was able to develop its Franklin fields, some thirty miles southeast of Seattle. The Franklin Coal Company was incorporated in 1884 and went into production the following year. As illustrated in Table III many companies opened mines in the 1880's, but the output from Newcastle and Franklin assured the place of the OIC as the leading independent producer.⁷

But success proved fleeting for Villard and eventually for the OIC. In January 1884 Villard, who was also president of the NPR at the time, fell victim to his many enemies on the NPR board and lost control of both the NPR and the OIC. Elijah Smith left the NPR and became president of the OIC. He moved

TABLE III: COAL MINES OF WASHINGTON - 1888*

COUNTY	MINE	OPERATOR IN 1888	MINE OPENED	PRODUCTION 1888 (TONS)
Whatcom	Bellingham Bay	Black Diamond Coal Co.	1854-1878	
King	Newcastle	Oregon Improvement Co.	1871	155,000
	Franklin	Oregon Improvement Co.	1884	86,966
	Black Diamond	Black Diamond Coal Co.	1885	148,000
	Cedar Mountain	Cedar River Coal Co.	1884	41,662
	Gilman (Issaquah)	Seattle Coal and Iron Co.	1887	14,907
	Talbot	Renton Coal Co.	1875-1879	-
	Renton	Renton Coal Co.	1874-1885	-
Pierce	Carbonado	Pacific Improvement Co. (CPRR)	1880	213,145
	South Prairie	South Prairie Coal Co.	1882	40,934
	Wilkeson	Tacoma Coal and Coke Co.	1876	12,877
	Wilkeson	Wilkeson Coal and Coke Co.	1887	10,000
Thurston	Bucoda	Northwestern Coal & Trans. Co.	1887	42,000
Kittitas	Roslyn	Northern Pacific Coal Co (NPR)	1885	220,000

Source: U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Resources of the United States
1883-84, p. 381; 1886, pp. 364-365; 1887, pp. 369,371; 1888, p. 381.

* By 1888 the patterns of Washington mining were established. It was also in 1888 that blacks were first brought to Washington thus beginning three years of intense strife between operators and employees.

its head office from Portland to New York and established branch offices in Seattle and San Francisco.⁸

With the departure of Villard the shaky financial position of the OIC became apparent. Villard left the OIC with a six million dollar debt with which to face the economic downturn in 1884. He had put the company in debt in order to finance his other ventures, and the results were nearly disastrous. In 1883 OIC stock sold for \$91.00, but by April 1884 it had dropped to \$24.00. The company was saved by the output from its mines, but the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* was being kind when it described the OIC as suffering from "financial embarrassment."⁹

But poor finances was not the OIC's only problem. According to an economic post-mortem completed by Thomas Greeve in 1896, the OIC was also hampered by questionable diversification and weak management. Greeve reported that the subsidiary companies of the OIC were more of a liability than an asset. The only OIC-owned railroad that consistently made money was the Columbia and Puget Sound Railway (CPSR) which operated fifty-four miles of narrow guage track between Seattle and the OIC fields. The CPSR was completely dependent on the coal market as its main traffic was the coal from the mines in King County. Greeve stated that mining was "absolutely essential" to increase the earnings of the OIC system.¹⁰

But Greeve had little good to say about the way the OIC conducted its mining business. He felt that maintaining three offices was expensive, inefficient, and hindered cooperation

among the abundance of OIC officers. In employing mine managers the OIC sought economy not quality and ultimately paid a dear price. More important, the OIC used poor initial engineering in its mines which proved to be expensive and made mine maintenance difficult. The OIC had the unfortunate knack of digging its mine entrances in the wrong locations which meant they eventually had to be closed and redug. Both Newcastle and Franklin were handicapped by weak roofs and highly pitched beds, and both were plagued with fires and explosions which in part were a result of the OIC's cheap ventilation systems.¹¹

Inefficient and costly business practices, poor financing and an extremely competitive market kept the OIC in a precarious position during its years of operation. Given these conditions, it was likely that the OIC would emphasize the factor of production that appeared the easiest to control -- labor. To the OIC officers labor was just another cost, a cost that had to be kept to an absolute minimum. The OIC's problems with its employees began over wages and working conditions, but they soon broadened to include union recognition and the hiring and firing of certain employees. In order to understand these disputes and their significance for all mine workers in Washington, it would be helpful to briefly look at labor in Washington, particularly the Knights of Labor who organized the mine workers.¹²

Unions were almost nonexistent in Washington before 1880. Up to that time industrial development was limited; the roles of employer and employee were often combined, and the relation-

ship between wage earner and wage payer was informal and flexible. There was no strong sense of class consciousness among workers and no deep divisions between capital and labor. Attitudes, however, did change in the mid 1880's when divisions of wealth became more extreme and the frontier gave way to a more diversified economy in rapidly developing urban areas like Seattle.¹³

For most of the decade the predominant spokesmen for labor were the Knights of Labor. The Knights were active in Washington from the early 1880's, and they firmly believed that there were basic inequalities between capital and labor that had to be rectified. The source of the Knights strength in Washington was their ability to organize the coal mine workers. Initially the Washington Knights benefitted from the assistance of the national organization under the leadership of Terrence Powderly.

Terrence Powderly ruled the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor as Grand Master Workman from 1880-1893, and under his direction the Knights took advantage of the labor turmoil of the 1880's and became the most influential national labor organization. By 1886 over seven hundred thousand people belonged to the Knights, and local assemblies were established across the nation. Powderly reduced the secrecy and ritual that had restricted the effectiveness of the Order since its founding in 1869 by a group of Philadelphia garment workers. Powderly intended to battle the growing power of capital by creating a highly centralized organization that included all wage earners (except doctors, lawyers, bankers, stockholders, professional

gamblers, and liquor dealers) irregardless of race, religion, or sex. As Norman Ware has astutely observed:

It was to fight consolidated capital that the Order tried to create an integrated labor society to replace the craft alliances and conventions of reformers that had preceded. When the Knights began the unions were almost destroyed ... The Order tried to teach the American wage-earner that he was a wage-earner first and a bricklayer, carpenter, miner, shoemakers, after; that he was a wage-earner first and a Catholic, Protestant, Jew, white, black, Democrat, Republican, after. This meant that the Order was teaching something that was not in the hope that it would be.¹⁴

Though all were espoused as virtues and policy, the basic principle of the Knights was not cooperation, equal pay and rights for the sexes, the eight-hour day, land reform, or arbitration instead of strikes. Rather it was protection for the American worker. Protection was meant to be loosely defined, but for Powderly it particularly referred to the elimination of cheap, foreign labor hired on contract by large companies. This labor was often used to break or prevent strikes and more generally to suppress wages and unions. Throughout the 1880's Powderly campaigned for a Federal law prohibiting foreign contract labor.¹⁵

Powderly's vision of a highly centralized labor organization remained just that -- a vision. For the most part the local assemblies remained autonomous and planned according to local needs and conditions, not the dictates of the General Assembly. Particularly in the West, the Knights were more militant than

was approved by the General Assembly. Western Knights continually violated the no-strike policy of the Order. Although not having any more control over miners than other Knights, the national body was a successful organizer in the bituminous coal fields. Coal miners were one of the first groups to join the Knights and one of the last to leave. In January 1890 the national Order, though on its deathbed, was instrumental in establishing the United Mineworkers of America.¹⁶

In the summer of 1881 Knights organizers arrived in Washington and established a local assembly (or lodge as it was often called in Washington) at Newcastle. By 1888, largely at the initiative of local mine workers, lodges were established at Franklin, Black Diamond, Gilman (now Issaquah), Carbonado (Carbon Hill), Wilkeson, Roslyn, and Cedar Mountain. It is important to note that the Knights' coal mining locals consisted of both miners and mine laborers. The Knights' strength lay in their ability to organize all workers, although miners tended to dominate the local assemblies.¹⁷

The Knights and the coal operators became almost immediate antagonists. All the coal operators, but especially the OIC, were keenly concerned with costs. They argued that the demands of organized workers not only increased costs, they interfered with a company's right to conduct its business as it saw fit. On the other hand, the Knights viewed higher wages, better conditions, and eventually union recognition not as interfering with the company's ability to conduct its business, but as offering the bare minimum of protection for its workers. Each

side adamantly defended its position, and the resulting conflicts shall be discussed in the following chapters. Yet in order to more fully understand the dispute between the Knights and the operators, one additional factor must be considered.

Certain coal operators, the OIC prominently among them, used racial minorities to keep costs down and to suppress labor agitation. First with the Chinese and then with blacks the operators appealed to the white workers' deeply ingrained racial animosity in hopes of permanently dividing workers along racial lines and thus eliminating the effectiveness of organized labor. The operators failed with the Chinese, but it is important to discuss that failure for the Chinese paved the way for the successful use of blacks in the mines.

The Chinese first came to the United States to join the "forty-niners" in their mad rush to the California gold fields. When gold was discovered in Western Oregon in 1852, many Chinese headed northward to continue their search for wealth. Like most fortune hunters, they found little gold and drifted into other occupations, particularly timber, fishing and railroads. The Chinese were often employed as low-paid laborers, and when the NPR decided to complete its road to the Pacific, it hired thousands of Chinese as white labor was in short supply. But the completion of the NPR in 1883 coincided with an Eastern financial panic, and no longer was there a shortage of labor. Unemployment was high and white people increasingly resented the competing presence of the Chinese.¹⁸

The Chinese had never been warmly welcomed by the predomina-

antly white residents of Washington. In 1853 one of the initial acts of the first legislature of the Territory of Washington was to specifically eliminate the Chinese and blacks from the franchise. Essentially Washington had anti-Chinese laws before it had Chinese. In 1870, the earliest year for which figures are available, there were only 234 Chinese in Washington, roughly 1% of the population. By 1880, however, with the increasing employment of Chinese by the NPR, they constituted 4% of the population, a noticeable and alarming increase to white residents.¹⁹

For white Americans in Washington there was no place for the Chinese in their society. The Chinese belonged to a different and hence inferior race; they had a different language and different customs. Like blacks, they were easy to distinguish and set apart. Further, the Chinese often chose to set themselves apart. Most viewed their time in America as temporary, and few Chinese men brought their families with them. The men clustered in urban areas, especially Seattle after the completion of the NPR, reading Chinese newspapers and patronizing Chinese stores. Their packed boarding houses in Seattle were viewed by the local press as sordid places, filled with gambling, opium, and boiling bones being prepared to be sent to China. Even the dead did not wish to remain in America, and no one was sorry to see them go. The *Post-Intelligencer* proudly said "if there is anything upon which there is practical unanimity of opinion prevailing in all classes on the Pacific coast, it is that the Chinese are not welcome nor needed here ..."²⁰

For laborers racial hostility was intensified by economic competition. The Chinese worked together and they worked hard. Because they saw their time in America as limited, they would take almost any job and at lower wages than whites would work. Many unskilled jobs, especially in laundry and cooking, became known as "Chinese jobs" and whites would refuse to take them. Worse for the Chinese though was the fact that they were regarded as tools of their employers, an effective way to break strikes and keep wages down. If a white man refused to work for a certain wage, there were always many Chinese willing to take the job for an even lower wage.²¹

The Chinese were perceived as a greater threat when the economy slowed down in 1884, not so much because they were taking jobs reserved for whites but because unemployed whites now wanted what had been previously regarded as Chinese jobs in a period of labor scarcity. The whites wanted their jobs but they were not willing to accept Chinese wages, which were considered both an economic and social insult. They demanded the end to Chinese immigration and "white-men's wages" for those who took Chinese jobs.²²

Washington and California were the strongest advocates of a Federal Chinese exclusion law. After much debate between Congress and President Chester A. Arthur the first Chinese Restriction Act was signed into law in May 1882. The act suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years and was extended for another ten year period in 1892. The act, however, was not strictly enforced. Only \$5,000.00 was allocated

to pay for patrolling the entire Pacific coast, and the Chinese continued to be smuggled into Washington from British Columbia. The Seattle Knights condemned the government as beholden to corporations which did not want to have cheap Chinese labor eliminated. Increasingly, labor leaders, particularly the Knights, demanded that the Chinese be expelled since it was felt they were now residing in Washington illegally.²³

At first glance it might seem inconsistent that the Knights would advocate the expulsion of the Chinese. In fact, one might think, considering the Knights policy of racial toleration and the desire for one centralized labor organization, they would have worked hard at organizing the Chinese. Nationally the official policy of the Knights is not clear. Few Chinese joined the Knights, but then few Chinese lived beyond the West coast. Some Knights seemed to be in favor of establishing a separate organization for the Chinese, yet three General Assemblies decided that the Chinese were not "considered worthy of residence in America."²⁴

On the other hand, Terrence Powderly's attitudes toward the Chinese are quite clear. To him they were a servile race and a threat to American labor. Their acceptance of low wages and poor working conditions, and the ease with which they were manipulated by their employers placed the Chinese in the same position as other imported labor. As Powderly correctly noted the Chinese were often imported under contract. To him:

Theoretically, it sounded very well to extend a welcome to all to a share in the protection to be derived from organization, but it was

soon discovered that to carry out the practice would leave this country with men to whom the American laborer could extend no aid, and who were too ignorant to help themselves.

Thus, the servile Chinese were not only a threat to American labor but also helpless and could not be "considered ... proper persons to become Knights of Labor."²⁵

The attitudes of the Knights in Washington basically reflected those of Powderly, but the local Knights were even more militant with their anti-Chinese feelings. Washington Knights not only refused to organize the Chinese, they were leaders in labor's campaign to expel them from the Territory. In 1885 the Knights were in the best position to lead the anti-Chinese campaign as they were the only well-organized labor group in Washington. Under the direction of Daniel Cronin, a Knights recruiter from California, the Knights quickly learned that anti-Chinese sentiment could be used as an organizational method. Operating from the platform that labor had to take the lead in the Chinese expulsion, Cronin recruited enough new Knights to have District Assembly 115 accepted into the national Order in September 1885.²⁶

Anti-Chinese hostility was widespread among laborers, but it was the mine workers who became the "shock troops" of the anti-Chinese movement in Washington. Chinese labor in the mines had never been popular with the white mine workers. They accepted the prevailing racial stereotypes and wanted nothing to do with the Chinese. They were also well aware that the Chinese could be used to suppress wages and break strikes.

But in 1885 a more pertinent consideration was the fact that mine laborers were not so discriminating about what work they would do. With a sluggish economy the laborers were willing to become screeners and pickers, jobs that were previously considered fit only for Chinese and boys. They wanted the Chinese jobs, but they were not willing to accept the lower Chinese wages. With the support of the miners, the laborers demanded that the Chinese be fired and that whites receive higher wages for Chinese work.²⁷

As one might guess, coal operators were reluctant to relinquish cheap Chinese labor. John Howard, General Manager of the OIC in San Francisco, was resolved not to give into his employees' demands. For sixteen years Howard ran the OIC coal department, and he rarely gave in to anyone over anything. Howard would cut any corner to protect his position and increase company profits. When he died in 1914, he was rich and under indictment for fraud. Howard considered the smuggling of Chinese from B.C. a "laudable business" and in 1885 of the approximately two hundred workers at Newcastle, between thirty and fifty were Chinese, while eleven Chinese were employed at Franklin. For the most part the Chinese were hired as coal pickers (those who separated rock from coal), tedious work for which they received between \$1.00 and \$1.45 per day, or about half of what a white laborer earned.²⁸

In the spring of 1885 the Newcastle mine workers became increasingly adamant in their demands that the Chinese be fired. Some Chinese were let go, but Howard said he would

not fire any more unless the whites were willing to accept the same low wages. As the summer passed relations between the OIC and its employees deteriorated and some of the earliest violence against the Chinese occurred at Newcastle.²⁹

Anti-Chinese violence, which occupied the Pacific Northwest for six months, began in September 1885. What started out as a series of isolated incidents quickly escalated into a determined effort to rid the Territory of the Chinese. With tensions so high between the OIC and its employees, it is not surprising that Newcastle quickly became a hot spot. On the evening of 11 September fourteen masked men drove the Chinese from their quarters at Coal Creek, two miles from Newcastle. The Chinese, who were employed at Newcastle, fled to the woods while their attackers burned their boarding houses to the ground. The white men were recognized as workers from Newcastle, including at least one prominent Knight.³⁰

Within a few weeks the anti-Chinese leaders not only were bolder but more organized. An Anti-Chinese Congress was formed, which was largely a coalition of labor groups and small businessmen. Spurred on by the Knights, the Congress flexed its muscles at the opening meeting on 28 September. The Knights demanded that all employers throughout the Territory discharge their Chinese or face the consequences. The Knights were serious. The next morning, at about 2:00 A.M., another group of masked men roused the Chinese at Franklin and gave them twenty-four hours to leave. The Chinese wisely hid until dawn and departed on the morning train.³¹

John Howard, who was in Seattle at the time of the raids on Coal Creek and Franklin, observed the meeting of the Anti-Chinese Congress. After the meeting he reluctantly gave the *Post-Intelligencer* an interview. He told a reporter that he had nothing against the Knights as long as they respected the rights of property and people and caused no more harm than other beneficial societies such as the Masons and the Odd Fellows. A few days earlier, however, he had written President Smith and assured him that the OIC would not be "dictated to" by "alot of demagogues and scum." Howard said he would rather close the mines than have his employees decide whom the company could hire and fire.³²

Howard wanted to retain his remaining Chinese employees, and he loathed the thought of giving in to the white workers' demands. But with the growing power of the anti-Chinese movement, he realistically had few options. He could close the mines, which the company could not afford, or he could discharge the Chinese and replace them with whites at higher wages. Out of sheer necessity he selected the latter option and discharged the Chinese, which he estimated would add an additional \$2000 to \$2500 to the monthly payroll.³³

The other mine operators who employed Chinese succumbed to the same fate as the OIC. Chinese workers were discharged or driven from Black Diamond, Wilkeson, and Carbonado. Such victories encouraged the pro-exclusion forces of the Territory, and they expanded their field of action. In November the Chinese were driven from Tacoma, and Governor Watson Squire had

to request three hundred and fifty Federal troops to protect property and the Chinese in Seattle. The troops arrived in late November but were soon withdrawn when it was discovered that they were physically assaulting the Chinese whenever they saw them in the streets.³⁴

But the very success of the anti-Chinese movement resulted in a conservative reaction. Increasingly, Seattle civic and business leaders became less concerned about removing the Chinese and more concerned about workers taking to the streets and disregarding law and order. By the end of 1885 Seattle was a divided city. The "moderates", led by Mayor Henry Yessler, wanted the Chinese removed peacefully and according to the law. The so-called "radicals", spearheaded by laborers, demanded that the Chinese be removed immediately, peacefully or otherwise. Caught somewhere inbetween were the Chinese. Disagreement reached the flashpoint on 8 February 1886 in the famous Seattle "riot". President Grover Cleveland declared martial law and Federal troops were stationed in Seattle for three months.³⁵

But the Chinese were gone. In 1885 there were 967 Chinese in King County and 957 in Pierce County. In 1887 only one Chinese was counted in Pierce County and 142 in King County. Though most did remain in the Territory, the Chinese population declined from 3276 to 2584 between 1885 and 1887. In the decade 1880-1890 the number of Chinese marginally increased, but their total percentage of the population fell from 4.2% to 0.9%.³⁶

Although the Chinese were gone, their expulsion was in

part a hollow victory for the OIC mine workers. More than ever the OIC officers were determined to resist the demands of their workers. Suffering from continual "financial embarrassment" and operating in an extremely competitive coal market, the OIC was opposed to any measure which increased costs. But the expulsion of the Chinese exposed two more basic issues. First, the white workers responded to the Chinese with fear and dislike; fear for their economic security and dislike of the Chinese as human beings. No attempt was made to understand what the whites and Chinese might have in common as workers. The workers had divided along racial lines. Second, men like John Howard and Elijah Smith were not going to be "dictated to" by their employees. According to them the company would offer decent conditions and a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. The employee, as an individual, could accept or reject this offer, nothing more. No collective or union could speak for the workers, for groups such as the Knights were regarded as beneficial societies, organizations which entertained their members and paid for their funeral expenses. Whom the company hired and fired were matters to be decided by the company, and the company alone. These issues would become increasingly important as the problems between the company and its employees became more pronounced.

NOTES

1. Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York, 1967), pp. 305-332. This is the standard text on the Pacific Northwest. See also, A. Norbert MacDonald, "Seattle's Economic Development, 1880-1910," (Phd. dissertation, University of Washington, 1959).
2. Johansen and Gates, Empire of the Columbia, pp. 320-322; U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, Compendium of the Eleventh Census, 1890, Part II, p. 486.
3. MacDonald, "Seattle's Economic Development," pp. 9-18. For more detailed accounts of Washington's early coal mining industry see Frederick Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Mining Industry with Special Reference to the Industrial Relation Problems," (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1931), pp. 4-10; C.H. Bagley, History of Seattle (Chicago, 1916), I, pp. 123-128; C. William Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1965), pp. 7-26; Marilyn Tharp, "Story of Coal at Newcastle," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 48 (October 1957): pp. 120-126.
4. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 21-24. For a thorough analysis of the Washington coal fields see U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, vol. 15, Report of Mining Industries of the United States, pp. 759-771. See also, W.H. Ruffner, A Report on the Washington Territory, (New York, 1889), pp. 94-146. There were three general types of coal found in Washington. Using the terminology of the day, the fields around Seattle were lignitic, the poorest quality of coal, and contained high percentages of moisture and ash. The Green River fields near Franklin were classified as bituminous-lignites, and offered good steam coal. True bituminous coal was largely found only in the Wilkeson-Carbonado area in Pierce County. See U.S. Department of the Interior. U.S. Geological Survey. Mineral Resources of the United States 1883-1884, p.99.
5. Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 19 April 1884, 1 January 1885; Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 49, 55; Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Industry," pp. 25-29; Thomas Greeve to John Waterbury, 9 March 1896, Oregon Improvement Company Records (hereafter OIC Records), Box 53a, File 2 (53a:2), University of Washington Library. For a good comparison of Washington and B.C. mining see, Mineral Resources of the United States 1886, pp. 367-369.

6. The other capitalists were J.N. Dolph, C.H. Lewis, Simon Reed, Joseph Simon, and Thomas F. Oakes. The OIC railroads were the Pacific Coast Railway, the Seattle and Northern Railway, the Port Townsend Southern Railway, and the Columbia and Puget Sound Railway. The OIC also owned the Pacific Coast Steamship Company. The best source on Villard's activities in the Pacific Northwest is still James B. Hedges, Henry Villard and the Railways of the Northwest (New York, 1930). See also, Greeve to Waterbury, 9 March 1896, OIC Records 53a:2; MacDonald, "Seattle's Economic Development," pp 23-30; Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 20-40.
7. Mineral Resources of the United States 1887, p. 369, 1905, p. 691; John Howard to E. Smith, 18 September 1884, OIC Records, 55:6. By 1888 the mines of the Northern Pacific Coal Company at Roslyn and those of the Pacific Improvement Company exceeded the output of either Franklin or Newcastle. But the coal mined by the Northern Pacific Coal Co., a subsidiary of the NPR, and the Pacific Improvement Co., a subsidiary of the Central Pacific Railroad, went to fuel the locomotives of their respective railroads. The OIC remained the leading independent producer.

Technically John Howard, the OIC General Manager at San Francisco, owned the Franklin Coal Company as he secretly controlled 2475 of its 2500 shares. Only twenty-five shares were publically distributed. The OIC was trying to hide its involvement in the Franklin Coal Co. because a good part of its land was claimed by the NPR. The dispute, which was eventually settled in the OIC's favor, lasted until 1891. See Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 41-46.
8. Johansen and Gates, Empire of the Columbia, pp. 310-312.
9. Post-Intelligencer, 23 April 1884, 13 May 1884; Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 39.
10. Greeve to Waterbury, 9 March 1896, OIC Records, 53a:2.
11. Ibid.
12. In the nineteenth century a "miner" was not anyone who worked in a mine. As shall be discussed in Chapter Two, a miner was a special type of worker in the mine. Other workers were generally called "laborers," but each had his own title according to the job he did. In this paper I shall retain the distinction between "miner" and "laborer" when necessary. When speaking of both miners and laborers, I shall refer to them as "mine workers," "workers," or "employees."

13. Meryl Rogers, "The Labor Movement in Seattle, 1885-1905," (M.A. thesis, Pacific Lutheran University, 1970), pp. 1-3, 94-99; Harry Stone, "The Beginning of the Labor Movement in the Pacific Northwest," Oregon Historical Quarterly 47 (June 1946): pp. 155-157; MacDonald, "Seattle's Economic Development," pp. 286-291.
14. Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States (New York, 1929; reprinted ed. Gloucester, Mass., 1959), xviii. On the founding of the Knights see pp. 23-44, 55-72, 80-91. See also, Terrence Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor (Philadelphia, 1890; reprinted ed. New York, 1967), passim.; Philip Taft, Organized Labor in American History (New York, 1964), pp. 84-92, 97-108.
15. Post-Intelligencer, 21 August 1888; Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, pp. 127-129, 218-229.
16. Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, pp. 213-218.
17. Frederick Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Industry," pp. 53, 55-56. Melder's best source is an interview with Frank Terrace, a Newcastle miner and Master workman of the Knights from 1881-1885. There are no records of the Knights at Franklin before December 1885. For earlier Knights in the Pacific Northwest see Harry Stone, "The Beginning of the Labor Movement in the Pacific Northwest," p. 159.
18. The expulsion of the Chinese from Washington is a tale told many times, and I can offer little that is new. Most of the accounts are based on the issues of the Post-Intelligencer and the Seattle Daily Call. The "P-I" is by far the more complete source. The two best general accounts of the Chinese in the West are Robert Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1964) and Alexander Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California, (Berkeley, 1971). See also, Jules Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 39 (April 1948): pp. 103-129; W.P. Wilcox, "Anti-Chinese Riots in Washington," Washington Historical Quarterly 20 (July 1929): pp. 204-212; Meryl Rogers, "The Labor Movement in Seattle"; Murray Morgan, Skid Row (New York, 1951), pp. 85-102; Roger Sale, Seattle: Past to Present (Seattle, 1976), pp. 37-48; Frederick Grant, History of Seattle Washington (New York, 1891), pp. 187-212; Clarence Bagley, History of Seattle, II, pp. 455-477.
19. See Appendix and Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese," pp. 44-48. The Oregon Territory which included the present day states of Oregon, Washington and parts of Idaho, Montana,

and Wyoming territories were organized in 1863, 1864, and 1867 respectively. Oregon became a state in 1859 and Washington in 1889. Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana all became states in 1890.

20. See, for example, the articles on the Chinese in the Post-Intelligencer 15, 16, 28 April 1882, 30 January 1884; and Saxton, The Indispensible Enemy, pp. 208-210.
21. Saxton, The Indispensible Enemy, pp. 261-264.
22. Ibid., p. 211.
23. Post-Intelligencer, 7-9 May 1882, 4 October 1885; Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese," pp. 285-305.
24. Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, p. 218; Post-Intelligencer, 17 November 1888.
25. Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, pp. 218-219, 210-218.
26. Rogers, "The Labor Movement in Seattle," pp. 9-12, 15-16; Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, p. 336.
27. Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese," p. 242; Post-Intelligencer, 1 October 1885.
28. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 27-28; Howard to E. Smith, 20 July 1884, OIC Records, 54:21, and Howard to E. Smith 24 July 1884, 54:23; OIC Scrapbooks, Box 69. Chinese workers had been used at Newcastle as early as 1876. See, Tharp, "Story of Coal at Newcastle," p. 124.
29. James Jones to E. Smith, 10 April 1885, 13 September 1885, OIC Records, 44:44 and 45:2.
30. Post-Intelligencer, 4-15 September 1885, 30 September 1885; Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese," pp. 97-100.
31. Post-Intelligencer, 29, 30 September 1885.
32. Ibid.
33. Howard to E. Smith, 25 September 1885, OIC Records, 56:29; Jones to E. Smith, 1 October 1885, OIC Records, 45:2; Post-Intelligencer, 18 October 1885; Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese," p. 102.
34. Rogers, "The Labor Movement in Seattle," pp. 38-53; Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Industry," pp. 55-56.

35. Ibid.
36. See Appendix and Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese," Appendix I.

CHAPTER TWO

COAL MINING

The structure of mining towns, and the nature of coal mining made conflict almost inevitable between a company and its employees. Mining towns were usually isolated, relatively closed societies dominated by the company which owned or controlled the land and important services of the community. There were only two distinct social classes within the community, the mine workers and the company managers and service personnel. There was little upward mobility and the relatively homogeneous workers found themselves drawn together as they shared the same grievances at the same time in the same place and against the same people. Moreover, the union local was the only countervailing institution to the company.

Mining itself was dirty, dangerous work, and each day the mine workers risked serious injury or death in the coal beds. The work bred tough, independent men who were determined to maintain their position in an irregular industry. But independence and organization did not always work well together, and the workers often quarreled among themselves. In addition, organization was hindered by lack of communication and much competition between mining towns, and the general hostility that prevailed against organized labor in the 1880's.

A company like the OIC encouraged faction among its workers. It wanted to mine coal efficiently and economically without any interference from employees or labor organizations. Further,

companies commonly argued that unions forced a man to subordinate his independence by allowing the union to make his decisions for him. Most coal operators were willing to treat their workers only as individuals, but in the end treating the workers as individuals and keeping them divided merely reflected different sides of the same coin.

In their physical attributes mining towns in Washington were similar to each other and local variations fitted comfortably into established patterns. Throughout the 1880's Franklin, Newcastle, Black Diamond and South Prairie each had fewer than one thousand people, while Carbonado had just over a thousand. None of the towns were wretched hovels, devoid of essential services. Each town consisted of private dwellings, company buildings, stores, boarding houses, saloons, and usually a church and a school. Franklin was built on the edge of a cliff overlooking the surging Green River, while Newcastle, one of the oldest mining communities in Washington, was surrounded by a forest of stumps, the timber having been consumed long ago for supports in the mines. According to the "P-I" Newcastle's burning slag heap was particularly obnoxious, but its streets were less dusty or muddy, depending on the weather, than those of swampy Black Diamond.¹

For the most part the mining communities were isolated "company towns." The towns were linked to Seattle and Tacoma, the population centers of Washington, by railroads and telegraph, but the roads and wire were controlled by the mining

companies. In times of extreme labor disputes the Northern Pacific Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railroad, was known to prohibit rail traffic to its mines at Roslyn. Thus, ties to the outside could easily be cut. The company also usually owned all the land in the town, and isolation forced it to become its own community developer. The company provided all the essential services, but it also decided what was essential. The Black Diamond Company shunned the company store and boarding house, well aware of the problems they caused. On the other hand, the OIC owned the store and boarding house in both Newcastle and Franklin, and the complaints from the workers about high prices, rapidly accumulating debts, and the obligation to purchase from the company were predictable and frequent. In 1886 striking miners at Newcastle directed some of their hostility to the company store. They completely sacked it and nearly burned it to the ground.²

Except for the store and boarding house, Black Diamond was perhaps the epitome of paternal domination, where economic power led to social and political hegemony. Like Newcastle and Franklin, Black Diamond had no government or police force, and not even a newspaper; for over twenty years all important decisions, and most minor ones, were made by company Superintendent Morgan Morgans. He controlled liquor, lights, medical care, official holidays, and even the company cemetery. His two storey house dominated the Black Diamond landscape. Morgans had the only servant in town and no social equals. He had a preference for hiring Republicans, and many new employees

quickly and quietly changed their party allegiance. Morgans ran his town honestly and efficiently, but as official company representative, Black Diamond was his town.³

Paternal domination was supported by a lack of economic diversification. Mining towns were closed societies; they existed because of the mines, and the coal company was the only major employer. Lack of diversification led to the development of only two social classes with the community, the mine workers and the company officials and service personnel. The absence of mediating groups, such as professionals or non-company white-collar workers, caused tensions between the workers and the company to polarize. And tensions were common. The workers chafed under the complete supervision of the company. There was no escaping the company; after his shift in the mine, a man went home to his company house or room in the boarding house, ate food from the company store, and drank in the company saloon. If he wanted to go to Seattle or Tacoma, he went on railroads owned by the OIC or Northern Pacific, the most important coal operators in Washington.⁴

Increasingly the mine workers of a community found themselves being drawn together. Unlike the East, Washington mine workers were not nearly so fragmented by ethnic and religious differences. In 1890 nearly 70% of Washington's population was born in the United States. Nearly half of the native immigrants came from the Midwest, and until the turn of the century most of the foreign-born people came from Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia. Washington miners were often

from Britain and Ireland, but they brought to the U.S. a similar culture and a common language.⁵

The experienced British miners also brought with them a tradition of mining unionism. The union local became very important in Washington mining towns as it was the only countervailing institution to the company. The local, which was usually organized by the miners of each town, provided the only social and recreational alternative to the company. More important, however, the workers operating through the union could present a force to meet and occasionally match that of the company.⁶

The structure of mining towns made conflict likely between a company and its employees. When the nature of mining is taken into consideration, conflict was almost inevitable. The effect of mining on relations between employer and employees might best be illustrated with a general description of coal mining in Washington.

Coal mining involved both above and below ground operations. Above ground were the buildings where the coal was screened, cracked and cleaned for market. Washington coal needed extensive cleaning as it was notorious for its foreign matter. In order to reach the coal below ground there were four types of mine entrances; drift, slope, tunnel and shaft. A drift entrance was an incline plane driven into the coal at an upward angle from the outcrop, while a slope mine followed the coal seam's dip from the outcrop. When there was no outcrop, that is when the coal was not directly accessible, a rock tunnel or perpen-

dicular shaft was driven through the waste material to the coal bed. Practically all the mines in Washington were slope mines.⁷

In general Washington mining followed the breast and pillar or chute and pillar method. On each level off the main slope, gangways (haulage routes usually laid with track) were constructed horizontal to the surface. From the gangways in turn the miners cut into the coal bed. The width of the cut depended on many factors, such as the thickness of the coal bed; the pitch, or angle, of the bed; and the strength of the roof. In Washington a chute cut was less than twelve feet wide, while a breast was more than twelve feet, often up to fifty feet wide. Between the breasts huge slabs of coal, or pillars, were left standing to keep the roof from collapsing. The breasts were connected by crosscuts through the pillars. Working from the top level down, the pillars were mined last and the mine's roof then usually collapsed.⁸

In charge of a breast was a miner. With the assistance of three or four laborers he determined how to cut into the coal, where to drill, and what kind and how much powder to put in the drill hole. After the explosion the large chunks of coal were broken up and loaded into gangway cars pulled by mules to the main slope where, depending upon the pitch of the slope, the coal was either hoisted by an engine or hauled on tracks to the surface. Machine mining was introduced in one Washington mine in 1896, but until well into the twentieth century the common tools were the hand drill, the hammer, the

pick and shovel.⁹

Like many occupations, a mine worker's status depended upon his job. Inside (below ground) workers were of a higher order than outside (above ground) workers, and skilled workers (carpenters, blacksmiths, engineers) had a higher status than unskilled laborers. Mobility was determined by age and experience. A young boy, often as young as ten or twelve, began his career as a coal picker or trapper, a ventilation door operator. As he got older a boy would graduate to mule driver or laborer, and if he was lucky, he would eventually become a miner. But the wheel turned full circle. When a miner became old or infirm, the latter usually occurring before the former, he would once again take to picking. A common adage of the time was, "twice a boy and once a man is the poor miner's life."¹⁰

In terms of status and respect among workers miners stood above everyone else. A miner was the most independent worker in the mine. He had the fewest ties to the company, often nothing more than an agreement to mine a set amount of coal for a set price. A miner usually provided his own tools and equipment, and he often hired and paid his assistants in his breast. Although not common in Washington, some miners were allowed to work when they chose, and miners everywhere came under very little supervision. A miner's chief concern was with his relationship with the pit-boss or foreman who determined which miners would get to work in the choice breasts. A miner could not afford to alienate the pit-boss, but neither would he kow-tow to him. If forced to choose he would most often

opt for independence. Carter Goodrich cites an example where a miner, seeing his boss coming, told one of his laborers, "Here's the boss. Don't work. Always sit down when the boss is around."¹¹

Besides being leaders in the pits, miners also dominated the Knights as well as the other mining unions. Being the most independent they were the quickest to be offended by the company's practices and most strikes were initiated by miners. While a miner's word was not law, and there was frequent disagreement with each other, a miner's suggestions were usually accepted by the laborers.

Miners and laborers continually complained about their working conditions, accusing their employers of sacrificing their safety and comfort for profit. Conditions were bad in the mines, but considering the nature of coal mining and the existing technology, they could hardly be otherwise. Yet, poor working conditions were made worse by the practices of both the operators and the miners. Ventilation was always a major concern. Until the late nineteenth century, when electric fans became widespread, mines were ventilated by two parallel air shafts. A furnace forced stale air up one shaft, and fresh air was drawn down the other and circulated through the areas of the mine being worked by a complicated network of ventilation doors. But fresh air was not the only ventilation problem. Coal mines often contained gas, particularly explosive methane (fire damp) and suffocating carbon dioxide (choke damp). Coal dust too could explode and its inhalation slowly destroyed a

man's lungs. Newcastle and Franklin both suffered many gas and dust explosions, and the Mine Inspector blamed many of these accidents on the OIC's cheap but inefficient ventilation system. Gas, however, could also be exploded by a miner's lamp. Safety lamps were invented in the early nineteenth century, but miners were reluctant to use them because they were bulky and gave only dim light. Instead they preferred an open and dangerous flame from a candle or oil lamp.¹²

Other dangers were always present in the mines. Blasting was a common cause of accidents and deaths, as were cave-ins. Timbering helped support weak roofs, but timbering took time and therefore was expensive for both miners and operators. Mines were usually below water level and periodic floods were to be expected, as were falling rocks and coal and the chance that a worker would be hit by a mine car in the dimly-lit gangways. Washington mines had the added danger of highly pitched beds, which made for weak roofs and poor footing. In the period 1905-1911, the earliest period for which reliable records are available, the Mine Inspector reported that one third of all fatal accidents and one quarter of all non-fatal accidents were attributable to the steep slopes and beds.¹³

Under the best of conditions mining was dirty, unpleasant work. The pits were dark and often quite warm. Miners wore little or no clothing, and to add to their discomfort they occasionally found themselves crouched in two foot seams or standing in waist deep water a thousand feet below the surface of the earth. Such conditions did not endear a company to its

workers, but in many cases there was little that the company could do to alleviate the conditions.

Disputes over wages also contributed to the antagonism between workers and operators. A general discussion of wages is difficult simply because there was no standard wage scale. Men were paid by the ton, the yard, the car, and the day. If a miner was paid by the ton, it might be the short ton (2000 lbs.), the long ton (2240 lbs.), or the miner's ton (2464 to 3360 lbs.). The rate per yard depended on the thickness of the bed, the pitch, the need for timbering and bratticing, and the quality of the coal. Such rates varied from level to level within a single mine. In King County the miners were usually paid by the yard and laborers were paid at a daily rate. In 1890 the U.S. Geological Survey averaged mining wages nationally. Considering the complexity of wage scales such averages should be regarded with caution, but the USGS concluded that Washington miners and laborers were the highest paid in the country with miners earning \$3.26 per day and laborers \$2.46.¹⁴

Such averages probably conceal more than they reveal. The dispute over wages in Washington went far beyond arguments over daily rates. Some complaints were predictable. More often than not it was the company that determined the length of a yard and the weight of a ton. Complaints from the miners about long yards and heavy tons were common, as were the accusations that the company recovered most if not all of its wages at the company store and boarding house. But more important was the fact that Washington mines rarely operated all year as

Washington coal often could not compete with foreign coal. In slack times operators reduced wages and discharged workers. With a stockpile of unsold coal, it was the miners who usually went first, particularly those miners who were involved in labor organizations. Miners claimed that they had to be paid high wages to compensate for the many idle days. More significantly, the Knights advocated a sliding wage scale of wages. Such a scale rose and fell with the fluctuating price of coal, but it could never fall below a set minimum. In addition, the Knights wanted to be able to share work in slack times so that some miners did not continue to work full time while others had no work. The OIC in particular wanted no part of these schemes, arguing that they were expensive and infringed upon the company's right to conduct business as it saw fit.¹⁵

A disgruntled, individual worker had few options open to him. A miner could always quit, but his specialized skills were not in demand elsewhere, and neither miners nor laborers could expect to earn as much in other occupations. Upward mobility was limited in mining communities. Some miners did become foremen and a select few made superintendent. But with a labor force of nearly three thousand and a stable management staff of less than fifty, such mobility was very limited. Individually, a miner or laborer could do little to change the system; he was operating from a position of no strength. A strong response could only come from collective action, an organized group of workers meeting the force of the company with a force of its own.¹⁶

There were, however, a number of factors working against labor organizations in the coal mining industry. The coal operators displayed a tremendous hostility towards unions, and tried hard to keep their employees from organizing. Unions were considered an infringement on the company's right to conduct its business in an economical and efficient manner, as defined by the company. Unions were also a threat to the cherished value of individualism. John Howard of the OIC continually said that he would treat his workers only as individuals and each man had the right to bargain with the company on his own terms. No labor organization could speak for all the employees. Though hostility towards unions in the Pacific Northwest has probably been overemphasized, the 1880's in general were not a fertile time for labor, and mining unions in particular were in a bad way. Union miners had been branded as terrorists after the actions of the Molly Maguires in the late 1870's, and with the Haymarket "riot" in May 1886 the Knights became associated with socialism and the peril of anarchy. By 1887 the Knights had lost nearly two hundred thousand members, and they never regained national prominence.¹⁷

While the structure of coal towns and the nature of mining often united workers against their employers, they also created stumbling blocks to labor organizations. Successful organizing required the support and cooperation of mine workers in neighboring towns. But mining towns were isolated from population centers and from each other, and the companies controlled both the railroads and the telegraph. For organizers,

lack of communication was a continual problem. Even when mining towns were close together, as they were in King County, union locals were organized in each community and operated independently of each other. The Knights Executive board attempted to coordinate the various locals from Seattle, usually without much success. In addition, the irregularity of the Washington coal mining industry made competition between the companies quite keen, and workers were caught up in this competition because their economic security was at stake. In May 1885, for example, the miners at Black Diamond went out on strike, and they hoped to receive support from other miners in the county. Not only did the Newcastle miners refuse to support the strikers, but a group of them, who had just been discharged by the OIC, went to Black Diamond and broke the strike within a week.¹⁸

Though ethnic tensions in Washington mines before the turn of the century were slight compared to the battles between native-born Americans and East Europeans in Pennsylvania, some tensions did exist. The Irish, Welsh, Scots, and English quarreled among themselves, and none of them got along that well with the Americans. English miners were usually more skilled than their American counterparts, and they took great delight in making the Americans look foolish and ignorant. Coming from a nation with a strong tradition of labor solidarity, the English and the Americans often locked horns over the issue of individual freedom versus the need for the workers to stand together. Opinions as to how to best deal with the company

were never lacking among the miners, and factions developed. For over two years the workers were divided by competing unions in the mining towns.¹⁹

Isolated, company-dominated towns, disputes over conditions and wages, hostility toward unions, and tension among workers all helped to create a strife-torn system. Mine workers met in mass meetings, argued among themselves, and then presented their demands as an ultimatum to the company. The operators, in turn, announced wage cuts and discharges without notice or consultation with employees. Further, companies like the OIC were occasionally adept at keeping the workers divided. Ethnic groups were played against one another as were competing unions, though no operator would formally recognize a union. Neither side, mine workers or operators, cooperated with the other, and initial mutual antagonism fed on itself and grew with vigor.²⁰

Such descriptions can be little more than a schematic of mining in Washington in the late nineteenth century. Naturally, there were many individual variations: all coal companies were not alike, nor were all company towns the same. But the structural patterns were remarkably similar, and an examination of the records of the Oregon Improvement Company allows one to see how well the leading independent coal company reflected these common patterns.

It takes little more than a glance over the correspondence between General Manager John Howard in San Francisco and President Elijah Smith in New York to realize that relations

between the OIC and its Newcastle employees were never good and they rapidly deteriorated as the Knights increased their influence. The workers complained often about their low wages and poor working conditions, but some of the strongest criticism was directed at the company store, or "Pluck-me" as it was commonly known. John Howard denied the charges that prices were too high, and he steadfastly maintained that employees were free to purchase from whomever they pleased. He added, however, that if the company's facilities were not supported, they would have to be closed down, including the understandably popular saloon.²¹

There was never much cooperation between the OIC and its workers, but what little there was evaporated during the 1886 strike/lockout, one of the longest and most bitter disputes in Washington mining. The elimination of the Chinese in late 1885 rejuvenated the Newcastle Knights who had been nearly destroyed by company spies infiltrating the lodge. With the expulsion of the Chinese, however, the Knights' influence increased, and the OIC estimated that five-sixths of the Newcastle employees were members of the Order. In December 1885, ostensibly because of a poor market, John Howard fired "a group of men" at Newcastle most of whom were "red hot Knights of Labor." As a result of the discharges the Knights were indeed red hot. They claimed the OIC's action was a "piece of tyranny", and they threatened to strike. But they never got the opportunity to go out. In January 1886, after learning that the workers were demanding wage increases, John Howard came up from San

Francisco, observed the situation and closed Newcastle, stating that the company was ready to "lock horns with the Knights."²²

Both sides were prepared for a long fight. The Knights issued a comprehensive list of demands which included wage increases for all workers, the elimination of compulsory purchase at the store, and the recognition of the Knights as the bargaining agent for the employees. When the Franklin Knights voted forty-seven to twelve not to strike in sympathy, sixty-five Newcastle mine workers walked thirty miles to Franklin and persuaded the Franklin Knights, in less than a gentle manner, to support their cause. Newcastle was locked-out and Franklin was now on strike.²³

John Howard was as determined as the Knights. He claimed that the original trouble was caused by "a few travelling demagogues of the Knights of Labor," and that he would deal with his employees only as individuals. Certain individuals would not be rehired, particularly six Knights' leaders, whom Howard considered, "turbulent trouble breeders..... [O]nce rid of them the society will go to pieces."²⁴ Howard wanted to aid the Knights' destruction as much as possible. In late March he informed Engineering Superintendent James Jones that:

By a quiet understanding I have with the owners of Black Diamond, South Prairie, carbonado, [sic], Cedar River, Nanaimo, and Wellington mines, there is to be an exchange of blacklists, and the rulers of the lodges of the Knights of Labor are to be denied work at all the mines. The intention is to rid that country of the agitators in the lodges, to strike terror into the weak and vascillating members, and to dismember the organization.²⁵

By the beginning of April neither the Knights nor the OIC had given an inch, but the unity among the workers was beginning to crumble. Newcastle had been closed for nearly three months; most men were broke, and many were willing to return to work. Noting the dissatisfaction, Howard announced he was opening Newcastle and offering \$3.00 a day to select miners and \$2.00 a day to laborers. A "number of men" returned to work, and the Knights blasted them as "Superintendents' Pets." But with the men returning to work, the Knights were forced to lower their demands. They managed to win a small wage increase, but Howard refused to recognize any union, and he maintained that no employee was forced to purchase anything from the company. Howard informed President Smith that he had secured a "happy termination to a very expensive trouble."²⁶

The long dispute of 1886 solved nothing and left relations between the OIC and its employees even more strained. But the real significance of the dispute is that it ruined cooperation among the workers. More and more men began to question the antagonistic practices of the Knights. These men felt that the Knights' continual agitation hurt all the workers in the long run, and they advocated a more conciliatory policy with the OIC. For the next two years the Knights made their demands; the company resisted them, and the workers quarreled among themselves. Finally, in early 1888, at the outset of three years of labor strife in practically all of Washington's mines, Thomas Hughes, a leader of the Knights, quit the Order and established a competing organization at Newcastle, the Miners

and Mine Laborers Protective Union, commonly known as the Miners Union. The Miners Union eventually established locals at Franklin and Roslyn.²⁷

The Knights immediately branded the Miners Union as a company union and its members as "boss-suckers, blacklegs and s___ of b___." At a mass meeting in May 1888 the Knights demanded that the OIC employ only Knights. The OIC refused and for the rest of the year it played one union against the other. By December 1888 the new Resident Manager of the OIC in Seattle, Hobart W. McNeill, a man who matched John Howard's ambition and exceeded his tactlessness, estimated that only 20% of the workers at Newcastle belonged to the Knights.²⁸

With men rapidly leaving the Order, the Knights were desperate but not defeated. Gathering support from other mining towns, between fifty and two hundred Knights descended upon Newcastle on 4 January 1889 to clean out the Miners Union. A gun battle began between the two factions and one Knight was shot to death. At the request of Colonel John C. Haines, who was also the OIC attorney, two companies of militia were sent to Newcastle.²⁹

The Knights immediately called a county-wide strike and the miners at Franklin, Gilman, Cedar Mountain, and Black Diamond went out, but the center of the trouble remained at Newcastle. When Territorial Governor Eugene Semple learned that the militia was at Newcastle without his authority, he ordered it withdrawn. Semple's attention had been focused on the continuing trouble at the Northern Pacific Coal Company's

mines at Roslyn where blacks had been brought in to work in the mines in August 1888. Once the militia was withdrawn McNeill telegraphed the Thiel Detective Agency in Portland, an agency that the Territorial Governor considered an "organized body of mercenaries ... who are ready, for a consideration, to perpetrate any act, whether treachery or violence, that may be required by those who employ them." Under the leadership of William Sullivan, twenty detectives, or "Pinkertons" as they were referred to by the press, arrived at Newcastle armed with Winchester rifles, revolvers, and Bowie knives. The Thiel detectives enforced the peace until the end of January when once again because of lack of support the Knights reluctantly returned to work.³⁰

At first glance it would seem that the strike of 1889 had changed little. The workers were still divided between the Knights and the Miners Union. The OIC refused to recognize any union and maintained it would employ and discharge whom it pleased, but it continued to play one group against the other. McNeill said the OIC had won the latest battle against the Knights, but he was sure they would fight again because "force not sense rules this class of cattle." The rest of the year passed quietly at Newcastle and generally at the mines throughout Washington. The market was poor and Newcastle was barely operating because of extensive fire damage.³¹

But something had changed. The OIC was fed up with continual and expensive labor problems, and they sought a permanent solution. Since August 1888 the OIC officers had been observing

the events at Roslyn where blacks were being used in the mines to quell labor agitation. As early as September 1888 John Howard advised President Smith to consider the use of blacks because:

It would take such a new element as negroes, with whom the whites would not assimilate, to prevent any further combinations. The experience of the mine owners on this coast with regard to imported white labor is that it is a temporary relief, and that as soon as the new element has become inoculated with the ideas of the old, (and it does not take very long to do this in this country), history repeats itself with the mine owners.

McNeill too, with verbal deftness, later suggested that the OIC "fill up with darkies."³²

No doubt Howard would have preferred to use Chinese. Even though they were spread out all over the Territory, they were more readily available than blacks. But popular opinion throughout the Territory was against this. The Chinese had been widely used in Washington and hostility toward them came from all classes. Blacks, it appeared, had the advantage of being almost unknown in Washington. They could be discretely brought to the mines where, it was hoped, they could be used effectively without offending the populace of Seattle. In the mines racial animosity would prevent blacks and whites from combining. There was some concern that the use of blacks would cause the white workers to forget their differences and join forces, but for organized labor to be effective it had to present a unified front to the company, which meant blacks and whites working together, an unlikely prospect.

The structure of mining towns and the nature of mining drew workers together and made conflict with the company almost inevitable. But the operators were well aware that the workers had difficulty in acting as a body and organization was vital if the workers were to secure their demands. Keeping the workers divided was the best way to keep them ineffective. In 1889, the officers of the OIC began to consider the possibility of permanently dividing the workers, and from the experience of the Chinese and the example at Roslyn, it appeared that the workers could be divided along racial lines.

NOTES

1. Seattle Post-Intelligencer 12 June 1881, 18 August 1888, 1 January 1891; U.S. Department of the Interior. Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1888, Vol. III, "Report of the Governor of the Washington Territory to the Secretary of the Interior," pp. 882-884; Marilyn Tharp, "Story of Coal at Newcastle," pp. 120-121.
2. Post-Intelligencer, 17 May 1886. One miner complained that because of the store and the boarding house, over 70% of his check was returned to the company. Some miners were less fortunate on pay day and received a "bob-tail" check, their deductions having equalled or exceeded their wages.
3. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 118, 116-120; A company was often left with little choice but to create a company town. In isolated locations the company was in the best and usually the only position to offer essential services. See James B. Allen, The Company Town in the American West (Norman, Ok., 1966), pp. 60-69, 128-139.
4. The general ideas in this paragraph rely heavily upon Harold Aurand, From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 20-29; Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The Interindustry Propensity to Strike," in Arthur Kornhauser, et al., Industrial Conflict (New York, 1954), pp. 189-212.
5. Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Compendium, Part II, pp. 1366-1367; MacDonald, "Seattle's Economic Development," pp. 42, 52, 54. Of the 250 miners at Frnaklin and Black Diamond in 1887, 93 were British and 89 were Americans and Canadians. See Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 101. With a mixture of Catholics and Protestants undoubtedly there was some religious tension, but such tensions are difficult to glean from the local press as the papers usually only mentioned if a mining town had a church or not.
6. Meryl Rogers, "The Labor Movement in Seattle," p. 29; Kerr and Siegel, "The Interindustry Propensity to Strike," p. 192. For a good historical description of mining and mining unions in Britain, see Anthony Burton, The Miners (London, 1976).
7. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 95, 98; Aurand, Molly Maguires, p. 33.
8. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 97; George Evans, "The Coal Fields of King County," Washington

Geological Survey Bulletin No. 3 (Olympia, 1912) pp. 200-208.

9. Mineral Resources of the United States, 1900, p. 308.
10. Quoted in Aurand, Molly Maguires, p. 37.
11. Carter Goodrich, The Miner's Freedom (Boston, 1925) p. 56; David Montgomery, "Trade Union Practice and the Origins of Syndicalist Theory in the United States," unpub. paper in author's possession, pp. 9-10.
12. Tharp, "Story of Coal at Newcastle," p. 124; Aurand, Molly Maguires, pp. 39-40.
13. State Coal Mine Inspector's Report, 1911-1912 (Olympia, 1912), pp. 48-52; Newcastle had, on the average, an incline of 40°, while Franklin's was 45°. Black Diamond had a gentler incline of 10°-30°, while Carbon Hill, depending on the bed, inclined 30°-80°. See Mineral Resources of the U.S. 1886, pp. 364-365.
14. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 106; Aurand, Molly Maguires, pp. 44-45; Mineral Resources of the U.S., 1889-1890, pp. 170-171.
15. Mineral Resources of the U.S., 1889-1890, pp. 170-171; Seasonal or irregular work was common throughout the U.S. coal industry. See Louis Bloch, The Coal Miners' Insecurity (New York, 1922), pp. 47-48; Aurand, Molly Maguires, pp. 9-19.
16. Aurand, Molly Maguires, pp. 55-62. Compendium of the Eleventh Census 1890, Part II, p. 486.
17. Aurand, Molly Maguires, pp. 109-110; Post-Intelligencer, 21 August 1886; Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, pp. 271-288; Ware, The Labor Movement in The United States, p. 66.
18. James Jones to E. Smith, 7 May 1885 and 11 May 1885, OIC Records, 44:47.
19. Medler, "A Study of the Washington Coal Industry," pp. 56-57. Medler based his analysis on interviews with miners from the 1880's, including many former Knights.

I have argued that the structure of mining communities and the nature of mining made conflict almost inevitable between mine workers and their employers. At least one author, however, believes that another dimension must be considered. David Bercuson argues that it was displaced immigrants, particularly British miners with their tradition of unionism, who promoted "radicalism" in the Western

Canadian mines. See David Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier, 1887-1917," Canadian Historical Review 18 (June 1977): pp. 154-175.

20. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 55.
21. The Newcastle workers seemed to have had a valid complaint about the company store. Whereas the saloon in 1885 made a profit of \$2500 and the boarding house \$1900, the store earned \$24,000 after expenses. In calculating the net cost per ton of its coal, the OIC often deducted the store's profit. In 1885 the store's profit reduced the cost per ton nearly 10%. See "Report to the Stockholders, 1885", OIC Records; OIC Scrapbooks, Box 69; C.J. Smith to E. Smith, 27 October 1890, 49:1; Melder, p. 57.

The OIC and the mine workers were also in disagreement over the medical services offered by the company. To pay for the services of a physician, the OIC charged each boy fifty cents and each man \$1.00 per month. By 1885 the company had accumulated a surplus of \$3400, with which it planned to build a physician's residence at no expense to the company. The workers suspected a large surplus existed, but the company continually refused to offer any information. But, then, the OIC had a penchant for secrecy. Much of its interoffice correspondence was in the form of telegrams and practically all of these, even the most mundane, were sent in a complicated code. In addition all the officers of the OIC had code names. See, James Jones to E. Smith, 26 March 1885, OIC Records, 44:42; Jones to E. Smith, 10 April 1885, 44:42.

22. Howard to J. Watkins, 10 April 1885, OIC Records, 44:42; Howard to E. Smith, 25 September 1885, 56:28; Howard to E. Smith, 26 December 1885, 56:36; Jones to Howard, 7 January 1886, 45:10; Howard to E. Smith, 23 February 1886, 57:4. See also, Post-Intelligencer, 23, 26 December, 1885.
23. Jones to Howard, 25 February 1886, OIC Records, 45:14; Howard to E. Smith, 4 April 1886, 57:8; OIC Scrapbooks, Box 69.
24. Howard to E. Smith, 4 March 1886 and 1 April 1886, OIC Records, 57:5 and 57:7; Post-Intelligencer, 16 May 1886.
25. Howard to Jones, 13 March 1886, OIC Records, 57:6.
26. Howard to E. Smith, 6 April 1886, 4 May 1886, 21 May 1886, OIC Records, 57:7, 57:8, 57:9; Post-Intelligencer, 3, 17 May 1886.

27. Howard to E. Smith, 30 May 1888, OIC Records 58:25; Post-Intelligencer, 13 March 1888, 11 May 1888. Because of continual labor problems the OIC began to add the following note to its coal contracts in 1888.

Sellers not responsible for deliveries during periods of suspended work at the mines due to strikes, accidents, or for other unavoidable causes.

(Howard to E. Smith, 25 April 1888, 58:22).

Alan Hynding's "The Coal Miners of Washington Territory: Labor Troubles in 1888-1889," Arizona and the West (Autumn, 1970) pp. 221-236, is the only published account of the problems at Newcastle and Roslyn. Hynding states that the competing union at Roslyn was called the United Miners and Mine Laborers Society and was allegedly affiliated with the International Workingmen's Association in San Francisco. (p. 222). My research does not support these claims. The IWA was a Marxist union and it seems unlikely that one of its affiliates would advocate a consiliatory policy with a coal company.
28. Post-Intelligencer, 24, 25 May 1888; 5 January 1889; Hynding, "The Coal Miners of Washington," pp. 228-229.
29. Post-Intelligencer, 5, 6, 24 January 1889; See also, Charles Gates, "Trouble in the Coal Mines: Documents on An Incident at Newcastle, W.T.," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 37 (July 1946): pp. 231-257.
30. McNeill to E. Smith, 22 January 1889, OIC Records, 46:02; Post-Intelligencer, 22-26 January 1889; Semple quoted in Gates, "Documents," p. 232.
31. McNeill to E. Smith, 7 February 1889, 27 February 1889, 27 March 1889, OIC Records, 46:5, 46:11, 46:17; Howard to E. Smith, 11 April 1889, 61:12.
32. Howard to E. Smith, 14 September 1888, OIC Records, 59:12; McNeill to E. Smith, 26 August 1889, 46:42.

CHAPTER III

ROSLYN AND THE NATION

The first black mine workers in Washington were imported from the Midwest as strikebreakers by the Northern Pacific Coal Company (NPCC) in August 1888. With the use of blacks the company broke a strike at Roslyn led by the Knights of Labor. But the events at Roslyn are far more significant for they foreshadowed the complete defeat of the mine workers in 1891. A national tradition of anti-Negro prejudice enhanced by the West's more virulent racism, and the minimal participation of blacks in the developing labor movement contributed to the coal operators' successful use of blacks in the mines. As hoped, the workers divided along racial lines and effective organization was eliminated.

The NPCC, a subsidiary of the Northern Pacific Railroad, was established in 1885 to mine the NPR's fields in Kittitas County. The coal, good quality steam coal similar to that of the Green River area, was primarily for the NPR's own consumption. By 1888 the three mines at Roslyn were extensively developed and when operating at full capacity gave some six hundred men employment.¹

Roslyn was a town of about two thousand in 1888. Isolated on the slopes of the Cascades, it was linked to Cle-Elum and Ellensburg to the South by a spur line of the NPR. Roslyn existed because of the mines, and in that respect it resembled

a typical company town composed of mine workers and their families, company officials, and the company employees who operated the stores, saloons, and boarding houses.²

The mine workers themselves were roughly evenly composed of Irish, Welsh, and Americans. Many lived with their families in the company controlled housing. Although sources are scarce, it is known that since 1886 the Knights had been organizing periodic strikes to win the eight-hour day for miners, better working conditions, and union recognition. By 1888, when the Knights of Roslyn became affiliated with District Assembly 249 in Spokane Falls, union recognition became acutely important as the Knights began to receive stiff competition from the Miners Union which was organized at Newcastle in May 1888. The Miners Union claimed that the Knights were hurting all workers with their continual bickering with the company and their disruptive tactics. The Knights accused the Miners Union of being a "company union," but more likely it was a less militant, conservative alternative to the Knights. The company, which refused to recognize any union, widened the chasm between the Knights and the Miners Union by making a point of employing Miners men when the Knights went on strike.³

What took place at Roslyn in 1888 is extremely important because these events foreshadowed the complete defeat of the mine workers in Washington. Unfortunately sources are scarce and occasionally conflicting in interpretation. Not only are the pieces to our historical puzzle largely missing, but

the ones we do have often do not fit well together.

On 17 August 1888 the Knights struck again for the eight-hour day. Relations between the company and the Knights had been unusually poor since a disastrous fire in July had resulted in the laying-off of many men and, according to the "P-I", "placed a crushing weight on the laboring classes." On 20 August a train with five coaches arrived in Roslyn. In those coaches were about fifty blacks and forty guards from the Thiel Detective Agency in Portland. The detectives were apparently posing as U.S. Deputy Marshalls, and both the detectives and the blacks were heavily armed. The striking miners quickly learned that the blacks had been brought in to work in Mine Number Three at Roslyn. They "hooted the Negroes," but offered no violence.⁴

Precisely why the NPCC chose Roslyn to make its stand against the Knights and why the company decided to import blacks, can only be inferred as the NPCC's records are not available for study. Roslyn did have some distinct advantages for the NPCC. It was isolated, well removed from both Seattle and Spokane where the District Assemblies of the Knights were located. The local press was of little significance. Even the *Post-Intelligencer* which, although generally favorable to labor, thrived on sensationalism, largely restricted the coverage of the events at Roslyn to its back pages. Roslyn was not only isolated, but the NPR controlled the rail access to it, and thus decided who went in and who came out. Finally, Roslyn was worth a fight. By Washington standards the coal was

good, and the NPR had made a large investment in the area. None of its other fields in Washington were as well developed.

The NPCC's decision to import blacks as strikebreakers was not a direct reaction to the 17 August strike of the Knights. Such a plan, as the OIC would discover some three years later, would have taken weeks to develop and implement. The NPCC's decision to use blacks was in response to the continual problems it was having with the Knights. The company officers must have been aware of how successfully blacks had been used in breaking strikes, dividing workers, and generally suppressing labor agitation in the Midwest. Moreover, the officers of the NPCC were quite adept in diminishing labor solidarity by encouraging disputes between the Miners Union and the Knights. Adding the race factor, it would seem, would be an effective method of making the divisions permanent. It is also quite likely that the blacks were viewed as a way to cut costs: they were hired on contract to work eleven hour days at lower wages than the white workers.⁵

The blacks were immediately placed in Mine Number Three. Under the direction of William Sullivan they were heavily guarded by the Thiel detectives who took the additional precaution of having fortifications of logs, earthworks, and barbed wire placed in front of the mine entrance. In response the striking miners began to carry arms and a tense peace prevailed.⁶

At this point Territorial Governor Eugene Semple entered the dispute. Semple was a supporter of organized labor, and he detested the use of "Pinkertons" in labor disputes. He was

also convinced that the Thiel detectives were impersonating Federal deputies. Semple sent Kittitas County Sheriff Samuel Packwood to Roslyn to investigate. Packwood shared Semple's feelings about the detectives, and he had a number of them arrested on impersonation charges. The charges did not hold and the guards eventually returned to duty. In the meantime, however, J.M. Buckley, General Manager of the NPCC in Tacoma, had become quite upset over Semple's interference. He claimed that Semple had removed the company's only protection from the striking miners. In retaliation the NPCC closed all three mines at Roslyn and prohibited all rail traffic to the town. Buckley said the company would hold Kittitas County responsible for all damages caused by the now locked-out miners and laborers.⁷

Semple considered the Roslyn situation serious enough to warrant his personal attention. He arrived there on 28 August and spoke to an "orderly crowd" of workers. No violent outbreaks had occurred so there was little the Territorial Governor could do as he had no power to intervene directly in company/labor disputes. J.W. Hoagland, the NPCC manager at Roslyn, informed Semple that the company would keep the mines closed for a year rather than "submit to the miners."⁸

Hoagland's comments were somewhat hyperbolic as he reopened the mines four days later, but the Knights refused to go back to work until the company discharged the blacks and recognized the Knights as the sole bargaining agent for the workers. In response the NPCC continued to import blacks to replace striking Knights. Increasingly, the Knights were being supported

by the Miners Union and the other mine laborers, all of whom had been hurt by the lock-out and threatened by the use of blacks in the mines. Suasion in this case was effective, but the Knights threatened those workers who were inclined to break ranks. Their feelings toward their employers were even more hostile. At one point they tied a mine superintendent to the tracks with the hope that a train would arrive before his rescuers did. The superintendent was rescued, as the saying goes, in the nick of time and placed under heavy guard.⁹

Both the Knights and the company were determined to outlast the other, but the company definitely had the upper hand. The NPCC officers were not concerned about the new-found solidarity among the white workers for the company had the power to break the strike, and, more important, the whites had not made any peaceful overtures to the blacks. They were treated with hatred and contempt. Although the Knights had the full support of the Spokane District Assembly, they did not have the resources to hold out. By 1 October 1888 most of the workers were back in the mines, and the miners were even forced to accept a ten cent per ton wage reduction. The "worst agitators" were not rehired, and the blacks continued to work in Mine Number Three.¹⁰

Through the fall the Thiel detectives enforced an uneasy peace which collapsed at the onset of winter. In later December two NPCC superintendents, N.P. Williamson and Alex Roland, were beaten by unknown workers. Williamson had brought in ten new men to replace some strikers, and Roland had been transferred

from Mine Number Three, where he supervised the blacks, to another mine at Roslyn. The men refused to work for a "nigger-driver" and Roland suffered the consequences. On 19 January 1889 sixty workers from Roslyn descended on Cle-Elum and threatened to "clean out the town." By the 22nd about four hundred and fifty men were on strike demanding that Roland and the blacks be fired. Sheriff Packwood asked Semple to send the militia to Roslyn because the company was determined to bring in more blacks, and Packwood feared a riot. Semple paid another visit to Roslyn, but he did not consider the situation serious enough to warrant the expense of calling out the militia.¹¹

Packwood's information about the company's plans was accurate. On 25 January the NPCC fired all its striking employees. The next day forty-five more blacks arrived, and the company announced that it would bring as many Negroes as necessary to operate all of its mines not just Number Three. Hoagland said that the company was determined to conduct its business as it saw fit, and the NPCC would not be bound to any labor organization.¹²

The NPCC was true to its word. By the end of the month another fifty blacks had arrived. Hostility between the strikers and the blacks increased, and one Negro miner was killed as a result of "trouble over a woman." On 15 February 1889 the "P-I" announced that three to four hundred "Black Valentines", Negro mine workers and their families, had arrived in Roslyn. The "P-I" went on to describe the new arrivals as "settlers", as they had come to settle the strike between the

NPCC and its workers.¹³

The mine workers were defeated and they realized it. If need be the company was prepared to replace "every white miner with a colored miner," and the NPCC had the support of the parent company for such an undertaking. The strikers were broke: they had little choice but to return to work, if the company would take them, or leave. Those who could afford to left for Montana; the rest drifted back to the mines. The demands of the miners ceased. Union recognition was a dead issue and so were the unions. In the next two years, when clashes between Washington coal operators and employees peaked, the workers in Roslyn were strangely quiet. They would not be heard from again until the United Mine Workers began to organize them at the end of the century.¹⁴

Although Roslyn was on the edge of Washington coal country, the events there were significant for a number of reasons. Not only were the blacks first used at Roslyn, they were used with tremendous success. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the Knights suffered complete defeat. The Knights, in fact all the white strikers, played into the company's hands. Though the use of blacks did reduce the significance of the dispute between the Knights and the Miners Union and helped to unite all white workers, no attempt was made to bring the blacks into the fold. Similar to the reactions against the Chinese at Newcastle and Franklin, the Roslyn workers made no attempt to convince the blacks what they had in common as workers with the strikers. Understandable antagonism

to strikebreakers and cheap labor was amplified by racial hostility. To the strikers the blacks were "blacklegs" in the most colorful and derogatory sense of the word. Eugene Semple saw to the heart of the matter when he filed his report of the Roslyn incident to Secretary of the Interior William Vilas:

I am inclined to think that this policy is the worst for the negroes, themselves, for a general impression is liable to be created there by, amongst the white laborers, that negroes can be used by capitalists as instruments to create artificial standards of wages. The inevitable result of that would be to raise up a wall of prejudice between the races¹⁵

The wall of prejudice between the races was built long before Roslyn, but the use of blacks in the mines was to make that wall stronger.

Roslyn was also important because other Washington coal operators were paying attention to what happened there. The OIC Resident Manager, Hobart McNeill, who had more than his fill of labor problems in 1888 and 1889, keenly read the Seattle papers and thought the OIC should follow the NPCC's example. In February 1889 he wrote President Smith with the advice that:

The N.P. Co. have a taste of a good thing at Roslyn. They landed two hundred and fifty more negroes there last week.... [T]hese people have cut the knot.... [B]lack labor would make every man that holds on to his high labor basis fall into the tail of the procession.¹⁶

McNeill believed he had found the key to prevent combinations of labor. In little more than a year the OIC was developing a plan to import blacks to work in its mines.

Finally, Roslyn was important because the events which took place there were not unique to the Washington coal industry. They generally reflected national patterns in terms of racial attitudes and operator/employee relations. A brief look at the national scene, which neither is nor is intended to be a comprehensive analysis, will allow us to more fully understand not only what happened at Roslyn and later at Franklin and Newcastle, but also something of the more general significance of these events.

Negro slavery officially ended in the United States with the defeat of the Confederacy and the amending of the Constitution. But two hundred years of ingrained racial prejudice could not be erased with a Constitutional amendment. The tradition of anti-Negro prejudice in general in the U.S. is well documented and need not be discussed here.¹⁷

Yet, although the belief in the innate inferiority of blacks was accepted by most Americans, reactions to blacks varied considerably. Until the twentieth century most blacks lived in the South where they occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder, first as slaves and then as degraded citizens. But blacks had been a part of Southern life almost from the beginning, and they did have a place in the South. As Eugene Genovese has argued, under chattel slavery an "organic relationship" developed between slave and master. Each was aware of his place in society, but each was dependent upon the other, and each owed the other certain reciprocal obligations.¹⁸ Slavery came to an end but many of the behavioral patterns between

blacks and whites remained and, for better or worse, blacks were still very much a part of Southern life.

On the other hand, blacks were almost unknown in the Midwest and Far West in the nineteenth century. Blacks had no place in the West and their presence, even the possibility of their presence, elicited much hostility from the white residents. Anti-Negro prejudice was present early in the Midwest: by 1804, for example, Ohio had stringent anti-Negro laws. In Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin free blacks were denied the franchise, while Indiana and Illinois passed laws making it illegal for blacks to live in these states. Blacks were despised as a race and feared because of their potential economic competition and the horrible spectre of miscegenation. During the slavery extension controversy Midwesterners were strong supporters of Free Soil, but they were not abolitionists. Basically, they wanted no blacks, free or slave, in their states. Colonization of all blacks was more popular than abolition. In 1860 blacks accounted for barely 1% of the Midwest population, yet Senator Lyman Trumble of Illinois felt the need to comment that there "is a great aversion in the West ... against having free Negroes come among us. Our people want nothing to do with the Negro." Trumble was supported by the *Illinois State Journal*:

The truth is, the nigger is an unpopular institution in the free states. Even those who are unwilling to rob them of all the rights of humanity do not care to be brought into close contact with them19

The migrants from the Midwest to the Pacific coast brought their prejudices with them. The people of Washington, Oregon, and California were opposed to the extension of slavery, but they were not strong abolitionists, fearing that free Negroes might migrate to the West coast. In 1844 the provisional government of Oregon passed a law prohibiting slavery within its borders. The law also ordered all slaves, free Negroes, and Mulattoes out of the territory within two years. According to the law those who remained would be subject to periodic floggings. In 1857 the people of Oregon were voting on a proposed state constitution. They voted to prohibit slavery and to exclude all blacks from the new state. In fact Negro exclusion passed by a greater margin than the prohibition of slavery. With fewer than two hundred blacks in the state at the time, Oregon had the dubious distinction of being the only state to have Negro exclusion in its constitution.²⁰

In California blacks fared little better. Nominally a free state, California Republicans and Democrats were kept busy in the late 1850's accusing each other of "nigger-loving." In 1858 conditions for blacks in California became so bad that a group of sixty-five, led by Archy Lee, emigrated to British Columbia. A few hundred more followed the original emigrants, and they were B.C.'s first black residents.²¹

Although anti-Negro prejudice in Washington was not as virulent as in Oregon, its first Territorial Legislature in 1853 did limit the franchise to whites. In 1854 a Free Soil party was organized which advocated sending all blacks, free

or slave, back to Africa. Like Oregon and California, there were few blacks in Washington (thirty were listed in the 1860 Census), and the residents were determined to keep Washington white. N.V. Holmes, a member of the first Territorial Legislature, offered an opinion which was not unpopular in Washington:

Niggers ... should never be allowed to mingle with whites. They would amalgamate and raise a most miserable race of human beings. If niggers are allowed to come among us and mingle with the whites, it will cause a perfect state of pollution.²²

After emancipation a slight increase in racial toleration can be detected, but this toleration was displayed more by politicians than the people at large. For most Westerners equality was not accepted. Since blacks were technically free, they were free to travel, and the people of the West wanted no more blacks in their states after emancipation than before. The fear of social contamination and economic competition was still widespread. Colonization was no longer a viable option, if it ever was, so Westerners demanded that the former slaves remain in the South. As a result of white hostility and the fact that the Federal government offered little assistance, the geographical mobility of blacks was limited, and even by the turn of the century most blacks still resided in the South.²³

Reflecting the dominant national and regional attitudes, there was, with some notable exceptions, little interracial cooperation in the slowly developing labor movement after the

Civil War. Both racial prejudice and craft exclusiveness worked to the Negro's disadvantage. With the founding of the American Federation of Labor in 1881, trade unionism came into its own, but there was little attempt to organize black workers. For the most part white workers accepted the prevailing racial stereotypes and refused to let blacks into their locals. Prejudice overwhelmed any idea that blacks and whites might have much in common as workers. Just as important were the various trade practices of the unions. Trade unions were economically, not politically oriented. In order to maximize their bargaining power, unions sought control over competition for jobs by defining the nature of and the skills required for employment. What evolved was an exclusive structure based on skills and long periods of apprenticeship within the union. Blacks were largely unskilled workers and thus were excluded from the skilled trade unions.²⁴

The entry of blacks into trade unions was also inhibited by the nature of black leaders. Men like W.E.B. Dubois, who wanted workers of all races to battle capital, were in the minority. More common were the beliefs of men like Booker T. Washington who considered unions useful only in aiding blacks to become capitalists. While Dubois condemned the use of blacks as strikebreakers because it destroyed the possibility of interracial cooperation among workers, Washington thought strikebreaking helped blacks "to maintain their right to labor as free men." Confronting a wall of prejudice and craft exclusiveness, and not possessing sympathetic attitudes toward

labor organizations, black leaders were not inclined to push for entry of blacks into unions.²⁵

Racial prejudice, craft exclusiveness, and indifferent leaders inhibited the participation of blacks in labor organizations, but they were not completely unrepresented. In some cases blacks formed their own organizations, but, more important, they were actively recruited into the Knights of Labor and their heir (in mining) the United Mine Workers. In 1886, when the Order as a national organization was at its peak, some sixty thousand blacks, or roughly 9% of all Knights, were members. The General Assembly that year was held in Richmond Virginia and Terrence Powderly was introduced by a Negro Knight. The delegates, black and white, sat side by side at the banquet table. Powderly declared that Negroes were free citizens and could "claim an equal share of the protection of labor."²⁶

Since the Knights were anything but a trade union and since they preached the equality of races, the fact that the Knights organized blacks might seem unnoteworthy other than to state that they were one of the few groups that did so. But when we consider the Knights' policies toward the Chinese and the reaction of the Roslyn Knights to black mine workers, the above information seems less clear and certainly less consistent. Below the surface, however, there is a strange consistency to the Knights' racial policies.

Although in Washington it was difficult to detect a difference, nationally the Knights did not consider Chinese and blacks

in the same light. Both Chinese and blacks were often used as strikebreakers and cheap labor, but the primary difference between the Chinese and blacks was the fact that the Chinese were foreign -- they were regarded as members of a servile race who were imported to lower the status of the American laborer. The easiest solution to the Chinese problem was to prohibit their entry, since it was felt they did not belong in the U.S. anyway. Blacks, on the other hand, had been in America almost as long as the original European settlers. Though they were treated as second-class citizens, they were citizens nonetheless. To the Knights the organization of blacks was both right and necessary; right because blacks deserved the protection of labor and necessary in order to protect American labor. But not even the Knights advocated complete equality for blacks. The Richmond General Assembly proclaimed that the Knights "recognize[d] the civil and political equality of all men," but the Assembly also cautioned that the Knights had no "purpose to interfere with or disrupt the social relations which may exist between different races in various parts of the country." Powderly added that "social equality" was for "each individual to decide for himself."²⁷

Not only did the Knights not advocate full equality for blacks, they did not try to organize all blacks. They concentrated their efforts in the South, where, granted, most blacks lived, but, more important, where blacks were more tolerated even if as second class citizens. The Knights made almost no attempt to organize blacks in the Midwest and West

because they had no support from the Western local assemblies. In the West, blacks were regarded in a similar fashion as the Chinese, a threat to the economic and social position of white workers. The Knights did nothing to change such attitudes.²⁸

Finally, organizing black Knights was not really very successful beyond the number of black members. Black Knights were never really accepted by their white counterparts. Official policy of the Knights called for integrated local assemblies, but most were segregated, sometimes at the behest of the blacks themselves who felt they could be more influential with all-black locals. Many white assemblies would not accept black members, and whites categorically refused to be organized by black Knights. As race relations deteriorated in the South, whites left the Order in droves. The Knights had never been able to attract the few black workers of means into the Order, and in its last days the Order in the South was largely composed of the neediest blacks.²⁹

Considering the animosity towards blacks and their minimal participation in organized labor, it is not surprising that employers quickly discovered the use of blacks as an effective means to promote labor disunity and impede labor organizations. In coal mining blacks were used as strikebreakers, particularly as race relations deteriorated in the latter part of the century. In the early 1870's black mine workers broke strikes in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and Ohio. In late 1874 Ohio coal operators imported several hundred blacks from the South and border states to break a long and bitter strike called by the Hocking Valley

Miners' National Association (MNA). The blacks were ushered in with armed guards and in a few weeks the strike collapsed and with it the MNA, one of the earliest "national" mining unions. Into the void created by the demise of the MNA came the Knights who were better organizers, but they still faced the problem of racially and ethnically divided workers.³⁰

Blacks were not always used as strikebreakers. As regular employees, but usually working for lower wages, blacks were often mixed with other ethnic groups in order to fragment the labor force. This was a common pattern in the Midwest where thousands of East Europeans were imported under contract to work the mines of Pennsylvania. Successful mixing of blacks, Hungarians and Italians kept the workers divided.³¹

On a grander scale, as Herbert Gutman has noted, the rapid growth of a national transportation system after the Civil War aided the development of not only a national market but also a national labor force. Employers were often remarkably successful in reconstructing the labor force to make it more efficient and more docile. Irritating local variations were smoothed out by introducing "'alien' institutions that reshaped the local economic and social structure to their [the employers'] needs."³²

In Washington blacks were definitely considered alien and their use in the coal mines there basically followed the pattern of the Midwest. They were imported from the South and Midwest, usually under contract, for use as both strikebreakers and low-paid regular employees. Their use as regular employees was

particularly emphasized in Washington since the white labor force was more homogeneous and thus had more potential for solidarity. Further, Washington coal operators were unusually concerned about costs and it was felt that the use of blacks would not only initially lower costs but would also keep a lid on the wage demands of the white workers.

But the use of blacks at Roslyn and later at Franklin and Newcastle has an additional significance. Nationally the coal industry in Washington was of little importance. Even Newcastle could not compare to the bituminous mines of Pennsylvania. Yet the practices of the Washington coal operators are important for they show the integration of Washington into the national system. No longer is it accurate to speak of the wild frontier with each individual living his life according to personal whim and initiative. As national markets developed so did national policies, the policies of integrated corporations. There were local variations in Washington, but they were variations from a pattern and not something fundamentally different.

In order to successfully confront what they regarded as the hostile practices of their employers, Washington coal mine workers had to act in a similar manner. Extreme personal whims and prejudices had to be overcome. The workers needed a common policy and unity in front of their employers. If blacks were installed in the mines, then it was necessary to suppress racial animosity, for the mine workers needed to understand what they, blacks and whites, had in common as workers. Con-

sidering the dominant attitudes in the nation and the West, the suppression of racial animosity would have required heroic, perhaps super-human efforts. In the end, somewhat ironically, the only unity that the white workers could establish was a common hatred of blacks.

NOTES

1. The most reliable published account of the trouble at Roslyn is Alan Hynding's "The Coal Miners of Washington Labor Troubles 1888-1889." A similar version of this article appears in Hynding's The Public Life of Eugene Semple (Seattle 1973), pp. 97-113. The Seattle newspapers are still the best sources but Semple's report to Secretary of the Interior William Vilas is also valuable. See Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior 1888 (Washington, 1889) III, pp. 913-917. See also Mineral Resources of the United States 1887, p. 371; 1888, p. 381.
2. Hynding, "The Coal Miners of Washington," p. 222.
3. Ibid, pp. 222-223. See also Frederick Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Industry," pp. 57-58; Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, p. 341; Seattle Daily Press-Times, 24-26 May, 1888. Even by Washington standards the workers at Roslyn were well paid. Miners earned \$1.15 per ton which often averaged to over \$4.00 per day while inside and outside laborers earned between \$2.25-\$3.25 per day. See Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 23 January 1889.
4. Post-Intelligencer, 25 July 1888, 21 August 1888.
5. Ibid, 21 August 1888; Daily Press-Times, 21 August 1888.
6. Hynding, "The Coal Miners of Washington," p. 225; Post-Intelligencer, 22, 23 August 1888.
7. Post-Intelligencer, 26, 28 August 1888.
8. Ibid, 30 August 1888. Semple did see to it however that the new state constitution allowed the legislature to prohibit the employment of "an armed body of men" by private corporations. See Hynding, "The Coal Mines of Washington," p. 227.
9. Hynding, "The Coal Miners of Washington," p. 226; Post-Intelligencer, 9, 16 September 1888.
10. Post-Intelligencer, 26, 28 September 1888.
11. Hynding, "The Coal Miners of Washington," p. 231; Post-Intelligencer, 22, 23, 30 January 1889, 30 December 1888.
12. Post-Intelligencer, 26, 27, 31 January 1889.
13. Ibid, 29, 31 January 1889, 15 February 1889.

14. Ibid, 14-16 February 1889.
15. Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior 1888, III, p. 893.
16. McNeill to E. Smith, 20 February 1889, OIC Records 46:9.
17. Though there are many others, three books strike me as essential to understand the origins of American racism: Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black (Chapel Hill, 1968); Edmund Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom (New York, 1975); George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind (New York, 1971).
18. Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, 1974).
19. Trumble and the Illinois State Journal are quoted from V. Jacques Voegeli, Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War (Chicago: 1967), pp. 18, 28. See also pp. 1-5, 14-18; and George Fredrickson, The Black Image, pp. 137-157.
20. Eugene Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy (Chicago, 1967), pp. 80-81, 93-95. The vote on slavery was 7,727 in favor of prohibition and 2,645 to allow slavery. On Negro exclusion 8,601 voted in favor of exclusion while 1,081 were against exclusion. See also D.G. Hill, "The Negroes as a Political and Social Issue in the Oregon Country," Journal of Negro History 13 (July 1928): pp. 255-264; R. Alton Lee, "Slavery and the Oregon Territory," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 64 (July 1973): pp. 112-119; T.W. Davenport, "The Slavery Question in Oregon," Oregon Historical Quarterly 9 (March, December 1908): pp. 189-153, 309-373.
21. Gerald Stanley, "Racism and the Early Republican Party," Pacific Historical Review 43 (1974): pp. 171-187; F.W. Howay, "The Negro Immigration Into Vancouver Island," British Columbia Historical Quarterly 3 (April 1939): pp. 101-113; Luther Spoehr, "Sambo and the Heathen Chinese: Californians' Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870's," Pacific Historical Review 42 (1973): pp. 185-204.
22. Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery, pp. 84-87. See also Robert W. Johannsen Frontier Politics and the Sectional Conflict (Seattle, 1955) pp. 20-24, 28-47. The Appendix of this paper shows that blacks never accounted for even 1% of the population of Washington from 1860-1900. These figures, however, should be regarded with caution. Joanne W. Bleeg has done a detailed study of the Manuscript Census for Washington 1860-1880, and she discovered that the

published figures do not always accurately portray the manuscript figures. But, according to Wagner, the census takers usually over-estimated the number of blacks in Washington. See "Black People in the Territory of Washington," (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1970).

23. J. Voegeli, Free But Not Equal, pp. 167-172, 176-177; Department of Commerce. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Negro Population of the United States, 1790-1915 (Washington: G.P.O., 1918. reprinted ed. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), p. 33; Lawrence B. deGraaf, "Recognition, Racism, and Reflections on Writing Western Black History," Pacific Historical Review 44 (1975): pp. 39-41.
24. Marc Karson and Ronald Radosh, "The American Federation of Labor and the Negro Worker," in Julius Jacobson, The Negro and the American Labor Movement (Garden City, 1968), pp. 155-187; Saxton, The Indispensable Enemy, p. 269.
25. August Meir and Elliot Rudwick, "Attitudes of Negro Leaders Toward the American Labor Movement," in Jacobson, The Negro and the American Labor Movement, pp. 27-48. Booker Washington quoted p. 41.
26. Post-Intelligencer 12 October 1886; Powderly, Thirty Years of Labor, pp. 350, 349-353; Meir and Rudwick, "Attitudes of Negro Leaders to the American Labor Movement," pp. 33-34. The United Mine Workers are, for the most part, beyond the scope of this paper. On blacks in the UMW see Herbert Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," in Jacobson, The Negro and the American Labor Movement, pp. 49-127. Gutman presents a rather optimistic view of inter-racial cooperation in the UMW, and I think he relies too heavily on the attitudes of the UMW leaders. Often the UMW members were anything but tolerant of blacks. See Darold T. Barnum, The Negro in the Bituminous Coal Mining Industry (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 19-24.
27. Post-Intelligencer, 12, 16 October 1886; Kenneth Kahn, "The Knights of Labor and the Southern Black Worker," Labor History 18 (Winter 1977): p. 68.
28. Kenneth Kahn, "The Knights of Labor and the Southern Black Worker," pp. 69-70; Melton A. McLaurin, "The Racial Policies of the Knights of Labor and the Organization of Southern Black Workers," Labor History 17 (Fall 1976): pp. 568-585; William A. Rogers, "Negro Knights in Arkansas," Labor History 10 (Summer 1969): pp. 498-506.
29. McLaurin, "The Racial Policies of the Knights of Labor," pp. 579-585; Kahn, "The Knights of Labor and the Southern Black Worker," p. 57. Sidney Kessler is more optimistic about black Knights than the above authors, but he does

admit that most black Knights met with hostility. See "The Organization of Negroes in the Knights of Labor," Journal of Negro History 37 (July 1952): pp. 248-276.

30. Herbert Gutman, "Reconstruction in Ohio: Negroes and the Hocking Valley Coal Mines in 1873-1874," Labor History 3 (Fall 1962): pp. 243-264; Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," pp. 49, 64-65, 98-104; Barnum, The Negro In the Bituminous Coal Mining Industry, p. 19; Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, pp. 210-211.
31. Post-Intelligencer, 22 April 1891.
32. Gutman, "Reconstruction in Ohio," pp. 263-264.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEFEAT OF THE MINE WORKERS

Throughout its sixteen-year life span, the financial position of the Oregon Improvement Company remained precarious. In 1891 the OIC decided to follow the example of the Northern Pacific Coal Company at Roslyn. Negro workers were imported under contract to work in the Franklin and Newcastle mines. With black labor the OIC managers felt they could operate their mines more economically and more efficiently. Blacks were paid less than their white counterparts and, more important, it was believed that the factor of race would keep the workers divided and allow the company to operate its business as it saw fit, without any interference from labor organizations.

The OIC's use of black labor precipitated the complete defeat of the mine workers in Washington. Although some attempt was made to persuade the blacks to peacefully depart, racial animosity and hostility to cheap labor kept the blacks and whites divided. Initiated by the Knights of Labor, the retaliatory strike of the white workers failed and labor organizations disappeared from Washington coal mines for over a decade.

In early 1890 it seemed unlikely that the OIC would require the drastic measures adopted by the NPCC to deal with labor problems. The Knights were completely disorganized after the strike of 1889, and the year closed quietly at the mines. In February 1890 a bill came before the state legislature which

would have established stringent ventilation and safety codes in the coal mines. The Knights strongly supported the bill, but the coal operators managed to have it narrowly defeated. According to Resident Manager Hobart McNeill, the OIC's proportion of the cost to defeat the bill was \$825.00. He did not state for what purpose the money was used.¹

Though labor was causing few difficulties, the OIC did have pressing problems. Its stock began to decline in early 1889, and profits dropped more than 30% from the previous year. Worse for the company was the condition of the Franklin mine. A fire in the new slope could not be extinguished, and McNeill complained to President Elijah Smith that, "Franklin is bad to the core, I am afraid ... Discouraging is hardly a strong enough word." According to McNeill, Franklin had never shown a profit, and it suffered from a weak roof, highly pitched coal beds, and continual fires and explosions. McNeill believed that the only salvation for the company was to find a "better product." He repeatedly tried to acquire coal fields in B.C. but with no success. A better product was not to be found so the company had to find a way to operate its mines more economically.²

By mid 1890 it seemed likely that the OIC would go into Receivership. Seattle Resident Manager McNeill accused San Francisco General Manager John Howard of being a poor businessman, and Howard countered that McNeill did not know how to mine coal at reasonable costs. Tempers flared and personalities clashed. Charles J. Smith, another of the ubiquitous OIC managers, threatened to quit unless he got McNeill's job.³

What averted disaster for the OIC was a "fierce strike" in the coal fields of Australia in September 1890. Washington coal was suddenly in demand in San Francisco, and the OIC officers regained their confidence. Charles Smith, trying to stay a step ahead of McNeill, wrote President Elijah Smith in September and said since the market was good, the workers would more than likely demand a wage increase. Smith told the President that their demands should be resisted, and the best form of resistance would be to "change the work force." Tired of labor problems, Charles Smith wanted a "permanent and final ending" to such disputes. Although he did not specify the color of the proposed work force at this time, he was well aware that McNeill had advocated the use of blacks since the strike at Roslyn.⁴

Smith's concern about wage demands was justified. On 7 October 1890 the Knights at Franklin, Newcastle, and Gilman asked for a 15% increase, while the Black Diamond workers requested 25%. Providing the OIC could get the support of the other companies, C.J. Smith felt the OIC should resist the new demands and install Negroes "at once" at Franklin. John Howard considered this plan "suicidal" because none of the other companies were willing to risk a strike with business so good. Howard suggested that the OIC "take advantage of present opportunities for profit and arrange a programme for fighting later."⁵

A compromise was reached between Howard and C.J. Smith. The OIC followed the other companies and acceded to the wage demands, but in November 1890 the company closed the Franklin

mine, keeping only twenty-five men to build yet another new slope. When the slope was completed, Smith planned to bring in three hundred blacks to work in the mine. Initially the importation of blacks would be expensive, and to pay the cost the OIC planned to drastically increase coal prices, deduct travel expenses from the Negroes' salaries, and to establish a support fund with the other companies for the "pioneer effort" of the OIC. In the long run Smith calculated that the use of blacks would reduce costs nearly 25%.⁶

The market in late 1890 belonged to the sellers for a change, and in less than three weeks the OIC boosted the price of its best coal nearly 20% and blamed the increase on the wage demands of the workers. In total the OIC increased its prices three times in less than two months and screened coal jumped from \$6.50 per ton to \$11.00 per ton. When queried by the local press about the sharp increase, McNeill replied:

To pay them [the workers] the 15% more as we have done on their demand, was simple charity. Now benevolence is the noblest occupation in which a human being can engage; and I don't see how the OIC can in good conscience be selfish enough to carry on the whole of this scheme of benefaction. We shall have to let the general public help us.⁷

McNeill and the other OIC officers were less flippant when the Australian strike ended in November and the company was still saddled with debts. By late November the OIC was faced with "a small army" of creditors, and John Howard said it looked like "breakers ahead for the company." The OIC was unable to meet its payments and on 27 November 1890 Joseph

Simon, one of the original founders of the company, was appointed Receiver by the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Oregon and the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Washington. In December Simon reported that \$237,000 in suits and attachments had been instituted against the company.⁸

For the moment the matter of black workers was dropped as the OIC was most concerned about reorganizing. A number of officers left the company including Hobart McNeill and President Elijah Smith. In New York William Starbuck became the new President and Charles Smith, as expected, replaced McNeill in Seattle as Resident Manager. By mid January 1891 the OIC appeared to be back on its feet, though few changes, other faces, had actually occurred.⁹

With recovery the topic of black workers again became prominent. Both Charles Smith and McNeill had advocated the use of blacks in the mines, and upon leaving the OIC, McNeill formed a company which offered to lease mines and produce coal at a fixed price. To keep costs down McNeill intended to use black workers, and he attempted to interest the OIC in his scheme. But C.J. Smith, still wary of the boisterous McNeill, claimed that it would be cheaper for the OIC to employ its own black work force, and he persuaded the New York directors to disregard McNeill's offer.¹⁰

Precisely why the OIC wanted blacks in its mines became clear in January 1891. During the Australian coal strike the Knights had enjoyed a healthy recovery at Newcastle, for it was the Knights and not the Miners Union who had demanded

and won a wage increase. The Miners Union slowly faded into oblivion. But still afraid of company "pets", the Knights demanded that the OIC employ only Knights in its mines. To show their determination, and no doubt their renewed strength, they threatened to strike. In response Charles Smith fired "sixty of the worst agitators" and replaced them with non-union men. He immediately informed President Starbuck that these problems could be avoided with the use of blacks. Not only would the mines be operated more economically, but a mixed labor force would keep the workers divided and allow the company to hire and fire whom it pleased without interference from organized labor. To Charles Smith the plan seemed faultless. Blacks would work for lower wages than whites, and racial animosity would prevent blacks and whites from cooperating against the company.¹¹

President Starbuck approved of the use of blacks in the mines, but the Executive Committee in New York was reluctant to give its approval. The committee disliked the initial expense of importing blacks, and the members feared a hostile and bloody reaction from the white workers. At the time of this discussion Negro strikebreakers in the coal mines of Alabama were being attacked and killed. No doubt the Executive Committee was concerned that it might be opening a Pandora's Box by using blacks in the mines.¹²

Noting the reluctance in New York, T.B. Corey, OIC Superintendent of Mines in Seattle, offered another plan. He suggested that the OIC force the miners, the real troublemakers,

to submit to an Ironclad Contract. The Executive Committee quickly agreed to Corey's plan, and a contract was given to the miners in March 1891.¹³

The contract was indeed an ironclad one. It reduced wages 15% and set tough production quotas for miners. If a miner's quota was not met, then the company could place more men in the miner's breast, and at the miner's expense. No miner was allowed to "stop work, join in any 'strike' or combination." Work had to begin at 7:00 A.M., and no meetings were permitted during working hours. All grievances were to be settled by the pit-boss or superintendent, and employees were not to interfere with the company's right to hire and fire whom it pleased. Discharge was without notice, and a terminated miner had to vacate his company house before he received his final paycheck. Any violation of the contract would result in loss of wages.¹⁴

If accepted, the contract would have served a purpose similar to the use of black workers. The company would be able to operate its mines more economically and without interference from its employees. The employee, as an individual and not part of any labor organization, was allowed to sell his labor at a rate fixed by the company. He could accept what the company offered or he could reject it and seek other employment. He had no say in the operation of the business. The OIC had had its fill of continual wage demands, inter-union disputes, and militant Knights who wanted to tell the company how to run its business.

On 30 March 1891 the miners and mine laborers of Newcastle, most of whom were Knights, held a meeting to discuss the contract which was immediately and unanimously rejected. A committee was established to offer a counter proposal to the OIC. Since the market was poor, the Knights accepted the 15% reduction, but they wanted wages tied to a sliding scale. As the price of coal varied so would wages, but they would never fall below a set minimum. The Knights agreed to give ten days notice for any stoppage of work, including a strike. In slack times miners were to be allowed to share work to minimize lay-offs and special privileges for company favorites. Grievances were to be settled by a mine committee equally composed of Knights and company representatives. If the committee could not settle the grievance, it would go before the Executive board of the Knights in Seattle. All discharges had to be approved by an arbitration board, again composed equally of Knights and company representatives. "Under proper conditions," which were left undefined, the company was allowed to hire whom it pleased.¹⁵

The two proposals were poles apart, which is understandable since the OIC and the Knights had opposing priorities. The company wanted to run its business cheaply and efficiently, without interference from its employees. On the other hand, after repeated attempts by the OIC to destroy the Knights with use of blacklists, lockouts, discriminatory hiring, company spies, "Pinkertons", and cheap labor, the Knights felt they had to have some say in the daily operation of the

business in order to protect themselves in particular and all employees in general. The Knights told Superintendent Corey that the company would run the mines, but the workers had to be protected from the company's economy and efficiency. The State Executive board of the Knights approved of the Newcastle response to the OIC. The board stated that the Ironclad contract would result in "a virtual surrendering of individuality to the company" and would create a "system of bondage equal if not worse than chattel slavery."¹⁶

Quite likely the OIC never intended to have the contract accepted by the workers. The company did not discuss the contract with the other operators, and had it been accepted, the OIC would have lost many good workers to companies with less stringent working conditions. But if the contract was rejected, then Charles Smith could argue to the New York directors that he had done all he could, and now the only alternative was to import black mine workers.

After only twelve miners could be persuaded to sign the contract, the OIC withdrew it and T.B. Corey mysteriously resigned and went East. Actually he had not resigned at all. Fully aware that the contract would be rejected, Corey constructed an elaborate plan to quickly gather black workers. With the rejection of the contract the Executive Committee gave its approval to use blacks, and Corey immediately departed for Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. In St. Louis he published the following notice:

500 colored coal miners and laborers for
inside and outside work ...
Good wages will be paid above men. Steady
work for three years. No strike or trouble
of any kind. The finest country on earth.¹⁷

Back in Washington the mine workers became suspicious when Thiel detectives appeared at Newcastle and Franklin. A common rumour floating around the mining towns was that Corey went East to hire six hundred miners who would sign the contract, but it was not until early May that the Newcastle Knights learned from the St. Louis Knights that the new workers were to be black.¹⁸

Corey's plan went smoothly; on 13 May 1891 over four hundred blacks, including fifty women and children, left St. Paul Minnesota on the NPR. Corey had hoped to hire more family men. They were more stable, and to Corey and the OIC these blacks were not temporary workers. They were a new, improved and permanent work force. The black workers, both miners and laborers had signed a three year contract similar to the one offered to the Newcastle miners in March except the blacks were to be paid 15-25% less than the whites were offered. On 15 May a mine workers' meeting was held at the Knights of Labor Hall in Seattle. The mine workers denounced the OIC, but they could not decide what to do about the rapidly approaching black workers.¹⁹

The front page of the *Post-Intelligencer* had a huge double headline on Sunday 17 May 1891 -- "The Black Train," "OIC Colonizing Its Camps with Non-Union Labor." Very early that morning an NPR train with ten coaches, a baggage car, and

a caboose arrived at Palmer, some three miles from Franklin. The white workers knew that the blacks were arriving that day, but they mistakenly assumed that the blacks would go to Newcastle, and there a large crowd had gathered. Under the guard of the Thiel detectives, the blacks walked to Franklin, arriving there about 6:00 A.M. Since the mines were closed the town was nearly deserted. A dozen people watched the blacks walk into town and one woman shouted, "Look at the Nigger slaves." Soon after they arrived, the guards strung a barbed-wire fence around the mine buildings and the negro quarters. Franklin's main street became a "deadline" and no unauthorized whites were permitted within the compound. The school playground, a common meeting place, was fenced off, and one hundred white and fifty black guards enforced the peace. The next day the Franklin mine opened for the first time in over six months. Technically, the blacks were not strikebreakers as the OIC had discharged practically all of its Franklin employees when it closed the mine to dig a new slope.²⁰

The immediate reaction to the blacks was varied. OIC Superintendent Corey was "jubillant." He arrived with the blacks and maintained they were brought to Franklin because the company was "determined to take possession of its own property and manage it." Resident Manager C.J. Smith said the use of blacks would not have been necessary if the Newcastle men had signed the contract. The OIC, according to Smith, was tired of the "constant agitation of parasites." Corey and Smith apparently had forgotten the terms of the contract for

they both claimed that the OIC had nothing against labor organizations. In fact, Smith argued, the use of blacks would be "beneficial" to labor organizations because the mines would be run more efficiently and economically which would allow the company to employ more men.²¹

The *Seattle Daily Press-Times* was content with the observation that "[t]he majority of negroes are coarse, uncouth, and ignorant." The *Post-Intelligencer*, on the other hand, feared that "... smouldering prejudices of race could be observed breaking out again." Such fears, however, did not prevent the "P-I" from stating that it "regretted" the action of the OIC because of the evil of contract labor and the fact that Negroes were "alien to this state" and "poorly furnished in the qualities that go to make substantial and independent citizenship." The paper went on to say that it placed at least part of the blame on the mine workers because of their regular work stoppages and "questionable demands."²²

The response of labor was not of one kind. A group of people, "representing all classes of labor," met at Wilkeson and resolved:

We will no longer submit to the introduction of the Negro among us, and ... we cannot and will not recognize the Negro as worthy of association with us; neither will we submit to association with them in any manner whatsoever.²³

The mineworkers at Newcastle took more direct action. They went on strike. Almost immediately, sympathy strikes were called at Black Diamond and Cedar Mountain. Gilman was already on strike which left Franklin as the only operating mine in

King County. When C.J. Smith heard about the county-wide strike, he was pleased because he was busy "working a combination with the other mine owners so that none of the miners will be taken back again except on contract ... and all the disturbing and agitating elements will be eliminated from all mines."²⁴

Suddenly the stakes of the conflict had been raised dramatically. No longer was this simply a dispute between the OIC and its employees. Other operators had joined with the OIC, and the mine workers were gathering support for a direct confrontation. Each side had reached the limit of its forbearance and tolerance, and each was determined to settle matters once and for all. Like the Chinese before them, caught somewhere inbetween were the black workers at Franklin.

The Executive board of the Knights in Seattle quickly realized the seriousness of the situation. The Knights had learned bitter lessons at Roslyn and Newcastle in 1889. If they were to be successful, they had to be as organized as the coal operators. The Knights board approved of the mine workers' decision to strike, but it wanted to make sure that the focus of the workers' animosity was the company and not the blacks. A press release stated, "This act of the Oregon Improvement Company ... must prove to workingmen that there is really no protection to American labor ... Workingmen must look for protection among themselves."²⁵ The Knights attacked the OIC because to direct their attack against the blacks would have meant falling into the company's hands. The OIC would have

loved nothing more than to have the whites focus their hatred on the blacks. In such a situation the OIC's goal of dividing the workers would have been effortlessly attained. Accordingly, the Knights board announced it was the policies and practices of the OIC with which the Knights were in contention, and they were opposed to the practice of employing blacks in the mines. Ultimately such distinctions proved too fine for most mine workers to make, but in the beginning such distinctions meant that, although the Knights were not willing to welcome the blacks, they were willing to attempt to reasonably persuade them to depart in peace.²⁶

In order to withstand the pressure of the operators the mine workers needed wide-ranging labor support. The Knights believed that if labor unions cooperated with each other then the mine workers had a good chance of winning. Naturally the Knights were not above suggesting to other unions that their turn might be next: once successfully used in the mines, blacks could be used in all industries. On 18 May, the day after the blacks arrived at Franklin, the Knights arranged a meeting with the Western Central Labor Union (WCLU), Seattle's affiliation of trade unions. The meeting went well and a committee of five striking miners and four WCLU members was established. The main purpose of the committee was to raise money in order to provide relief for the strikers and to offer return fare to the blacks at Franklin. If possible the committee was also to speak with the blacks and "see if they could not be induced to return whence they came." Blacks

were still not welcome in Washington and no one suggested that the blacks be asked to join with the white mine workers. Formal permission to speak with the blacks was sought from C.J. Smith who wisely refused the request. The deadline and the detectives were meant to keep the blacks in as well as the whites out.²⁷

The mine workers hoped to add to their strength by convincing other unions to call sympathy strikes or refuse to handle OIC coal. But in 1891 the Washington economy was sluggish and unemployment was high. Unions risked immediate self-destruction if they struck in sympathy, which overwhelmed any long term concerns they might have had about blacks entering their trades. Consequently, OIC coal was carried to market, and only a few workers of the Columbia and Puget Sound Railway joined the mine workers.²⁸

In spirit, but hardly in cash, fund raising was more successful. Over \$500.00 was collected in Seattle by a group of small businessmen who formed a committee to assist the mine workers. Local businessmen had never been fond of the OIC as it purchased its supplies from San Francisco and pressured its employees to purchase from the company. The Tacoma Knights sent \$120.00 while the Tacoma bricklayers and Typographical Union contributed a total of \$125.00. Though well removed from the dispute, the San Francisco Brewery Workmens' Union sent \$50.00 to the mine workers. Finally, the white workers of Roslyn were in no position to offer much assistance, but they did express their sympathy with the striking workers of King County.²⁹

In order to bolster morale and dramatize their cause, the Knights and WCLU organized a huge fund raising picnic and demonstration at Franklin on 24 May, one week after the arrival of the blacks. Over nine hundred people attended with delegates from all the surrounding mining camps. An outdoor band entertained, and local labor leaders gave rousing speeches most of which were directed at the black workers who watched the proceedings on the other side of the deadline. The speakers urged the blacks to leave and cease defending corporate tyranny. Two Seattle Knights, neither of whom were mine workers, even offered to help organize the black workers. Their sentiments, however, were not expressed in the resolution passed at the end of the day:

That we the miners and mine laborers of King and Pierce counties in the state of Washington ... do protest the inhuman action of the Oregon Improvement Company in importing cheap colored labor to take the place of honest white labor.³⁰

Hostility toward the blacks was temporarily repressed, but it was not far below the surface.

The striking mine workers operated under the assumption that the blacks would leave once they understood how they were being used by the company. This was a mistaken assumption. Looking carefully we can see that the black workers themselves had clear ideas as to why they were there and why most chose to remain.

After the first week about forty blacks, roughly 10% of the total, decided to break their contract with the OIC (which meant sneaking past the Thiel detectives at night) and accept

the offer of the WCLU for train fare back East. A number of those who departed felt cheated by the OIC, as they had been told there were no labor problems in the mines. Many who left did not want to be part of a labor dispute. Others expressed more basic concerns. One anonymous miner said, "I don't know much about who is right. Perhaps they are both right, but they've got all the guns and a dead nigger gets awfully cold."³¹

The vast majority of black workers remained at Franklin. Most were too poor to leave, but they expressed little desire to leave. The blacks did not need the white strikers to tell them what was going on. They quickly understood the situation and chose to stay. Charles Anderson, a black miner and former Knight, informed the editor of the "P-I", "we are aware that prejudice is against us here, but where can we go? It is against us everywhere ... Let them call us scabs if they want to. We have concluded that half a loaf is better than none."³²

The black mine workers received support from the tiny Seattle black community. Under the direction of Rev. Heseiah C. Rice, the Committee of Colored Citizens pledged to aid the workers at Franklin and to publicize the blacks' position. According to Rice, "the only way we [blacks] can get employment as workingmen in the North is to go in a great crowd to a place and take possession of it as we have done here. But we don't want to drive the white men out of here. We are quite willing to work side by side."³³

A few days after the blacks arrived the Colored Citizens Committee spoke to the black workers. They told them to remain

with the OIC, that they were U.S. citizens and fully entitled to all rights as citizens, including the right to live and work in the West. All speakers referred bitterly to labor unions that would not accept black members. Rice said if the unions would not help Negroes then they would and could help themselves.³⁴

While the band was playing on the other side of the deadline at the 24 May demonstration, the black workers were also holding a meeting. To the white workers' resolution they replied:

That we came here to stay and will use all lawful means to accomplish said end. In coming to Franklin we have exercised the right of every American citizen ... [W]e expect to enjoy all the rights and immunities guaranteed to all patriotic American citizens ...³⁵

To the black workers at Franklin the phrases "labor solidarity" and "corporate tools" were hollow and devoid of any real meaning. The blacks harbored no fondness for the OIC, nor were they retaliating against white labor for years of discrimination. If anything the blacks saw themselves as pawns, used by both capital and labor whenever it suited their needs. Each side was quite willing to sacrifice the blacks in order to gain the upper hand against the other and discard them when their usefulness was spent. Hence the speeches calling for the blacks to understand the white mens' plight and depart fell on tired ears. They had heard that tale too many times before. The blacks who remained at Franklin were not trying to support corporate hegemony or destroy labor unions. They were trying to earn a living, support their families, and live a respectable life

in a society which did its utmost to perpetuate their former status as slaves. Richard Davis, a black miner from Virginia who in later years served on the United Mine Workers board, aptly described the awkward position in which blacks often found themselves:

Now if there is anything I do despise it is a blackleg, but in places in this country that they will not allow the negro to work simply because of his black skin then I say boldly that he is not a blackleg in taking your places. He is only doing his plain duty in taking chances with the world. We ask no one to give us anything, all we want is the chance to work and we assure you that we want just as much wages as the whites.³⁶

In the end labor solidarity had little meaning for the whites either. The 24 May demonstration was the peak of resistance to the OIC. The negative response of the black workers was both a psychological and practical setback for the white strikers. Racial animosity skyrocketed after the demonstration, and labor groups began to quarrel among themselves. The Knights and the WCLU squabbled over jurisdiction. The WCLU told the Knights locals that it would coordinate all strike action or withdraw its support. The WCLU wanted all workers except those from Newcastle and Franklin to go back to work because they had no justifiable dispute with their employers, and the WCLU believed public support could be gained by the workers' show of good faith toward their employers. The Knights balked at this idea, arguing that all mine workers had to stand together against the operators and now against the blacks. In order to make their intentions clearly known the mine workers met at Cedar Mountain on 13 June and passed the following

resolution:

That we, the miners and mine laborers of King County, hereby agree to let the coal companies have their choice of either employing all white miners or all colored men, and we will not return to work unless all white miners are employed.³⁷

The day after this resolution was passed a reporter found T.B. Corey writing "Approved T.B. Corey, Superintendent of Mines, Oregon Improvement Company" on the Knights' notices ordering all striking workers away from the mines. The reporter asked Corey why he was in such a playful mood and good spirits. Corey replied that the demand by the strikers for all black or all white workers would help the coal companies because "it made the issue one of race between the white and colored miners, and not one of wages or conditions of work between the coal companies and their employees." Corey's analysis was correct. Repressed racial animosity now surfaced, and the mine workers vented their hostility at the blacks while attacks against the company became less strident. The coal operators were left in the enviable position of watching various groups of workers -- black mine workers, white mine workers, trade unionists -- quarreling among themselves. Worker resistance to the operators had quickly fragmented.³⁸

By late June the strikers from Gilman and Black Diamond were negotiating contracts with their employers, much to the chagrin of the OIC strikers. At Franklin the mines were operating without trouble, and C.J. Smith reduced the guards by half and decided that the time was right to put blacks to work at Newcastle which was barely operating because of the

strike. Even after nearly twenty years of activity, Newcastle was more productive than Franklin, and Smith wanted it going at full capacity as soon as possible. Eventually he hoped to have a mixture of blacks and whites at both mines which he assumed would prevent any further disturbances.³⁹

Once again the OIC wisely chose an early Sunday morning to transport its black workers. At 3:00 A.M. on Sunday 28 June 1891 ten guards and eighty blacks left Franklin for Newcastle. At 5:00 A.M. their train arrived without incident as Newcastle was almost deserted because of the strike. Franklin, however, proved to be a different story. In the afternoon a scuffle broke out between strikers and black workers and one Negro was injured. By that evening, when the Newcastle train returned, Franklin was a powderkeg lacking only a spark. The spark came from the guards on the returning train who, apparently drunk, began to fire indiscriminately from the train. The white strikers returned the guards' fire. Hearing the shooting, the blacks grabbed their guns and attacked the strikers. In the ensuing melee over a thousand rounds were exchanged. When the smoke cleared two white miners were dead and two women were wounded.⁴⁰

As one might guess no one was willing to accept the blame for starting the shooting, but that made little difference to Governor Elijah Ferry. He ordered National Guard Colonel J.C. Haines, whose other employment was as attorney for the OIC, to take a full regiment and disarm all sides. Haines placed militia companies not only at Franklin and Newcastle, but also

at Gilman and Black Diamond. The one hundred and twenty-five Thiel detectives soon returned to Portland, but the striking mine workers only reluctantly surrendered their weapons.⁴¹

On the 4th of July the "P-I" declared the coal operators had won as the strikers were slowly giving up their arms and returning to work. Under the protection of the militia white strikebreakers were brought to Gilman, and by the end of the month the strikers had signed a contract similar to that of the OIC, and the militia was withdrawn from all mines. The Cedar Mountain men soon returned to work, and on 24 July the Black Diamond workers signed a two year contract which was more lenient than the Ironclad contract of the OIC. The contract included a sliding scale of wages, a committee composed of miners and company representatives which would discuss discharge procedures, and the Black Diamond contract was the only one which included the clause that the company would employ only "good, honest-working white miners."⁴²

Tensions remained high at Newcastle and Franklin for some time, but by the end of July C.J. Smith announced, "the strike is over." He added later that the OIC had been "compelled to clean out the greater portion of the old force." The strikers had either signed the contract and returned to work or they left. To prove that the OIC had indeed won, Smith said wages would be reduced another 25%. Needless to say the OIC was not popular with Washington mine workers. When T.B. Corey went to Wilkeson to talk with a mine superintendent, he was surrounded by three to four hundred mine workers and sent out

of town at the nudge of a revolver.⁴³

With the collapse of the strike the whites became increasingly hostile to the blacks. Their hostility was double-edged. Since they had lost the strike, there was no particular reason to be conciliatory to the blacks, but there was every reason to hate them. The OIC now had a group of workers who would be used to keep whites "in their place." As the strike was ending the "P-I" declared that "... race animosity has reached such a point that the negroes regard any white man as their enemy until they know him, and negroes travelling on the road ... have had to prove their identity to escape abuse." In early July a "Committee of Citizens" held a meeting in Pioneer Square in downtown Seattle. One speaker announced, "You take 500 or 600 niggers, put fire arms in their hands, and they will not only menace the peace, but the purity of our mothers and daughters." The thought of having large numbers of blacks permanently in their midst was abhorrent to many people.⁴⁴

In response to such invective a "Committee of Colored Miners" passed a resolution which claimed:

That the allegations made by the striking miners that the Negroes were an uncivilized class of beings, unfit to become civilized citizens, and that they were liable to attack peaceably disposed citizens and commit outrage and murder, are false in every particular and without foundation in fact.⁴⁵

The black workers were just as determined as whites to maintain their dignity and defend their rights. They proved to be less docile than the OIC had imagined. When a "few" blacks at Newcastle were discharged to make room for returning

strikers, some thirty blacks went out on strike to protest. The company was forced to reinstate the discharged blacks, which again worked to the company's advantage as tension between blacks and whites increased as a result of the incident.⁴⁶

At first the use of black workers was successful. The white mine workers were completely defeated, and they accepted the OIC's demands for an ironclad contract, reduced wages, and a no strike guarantee. In 1893 wages were reduced another 15% and the following year another 10% as the national economy slid into another depression. In 1894 labor strife again rocked the Pacific Northwest. All the major railroads were on strike, and Coxey's army gained six hundred recruits in Washington. But the coal mines, except for a very brief strike at Roslyn, remained quiet. The OIC, in fact all the operators, reaped the benefits of the 1891 trouble, and C.J. Smith proudly exclaimed, "our force is the only bulwark against a general miners' strike in Washington."⁴⁷

The 1891 strike fatally wounded the Knights in Washington, and they succumbed in the Panic of 1893. Nationally the Order lingered until 1917, but it was an anachronism after 1890. In 1893 many former Knights joined the newly formed Western Federation of Miners (WFM). As individuals former Knights from Washington were welcome at the organizational meeting of the WFM, but the last struggling assemblies in Washington were not invited to attend because they "had agreed to wage scales that were too low."⁴⁸

Coal mining unions did not reappear in Washington until

after the turn of the century. Although the United Mine Workers were organized in 1890, they concentrated their efforts in the Midwest and were almost destroyed in the disastrous strikes of 1894. At the turn of the century, however, both the UMW and WFM gained a foothold in Washington coal mines. The first UMW local was established at Wilkeson in 1902. The next year the WFM organized workers at Roslyn and Newcastle, twelve years after the defeat of the Knights.⁴⁹

Under the auspices of the OIC the Washington coal operators managed to suppress union activity for over a decade, but the OIC enjoyed such benefits for only a few years. Black workers could not improve the poor initial planning and engineering at the OIC mines, or their weak roofs and highly pitched beds. Mining costs remained high and the quality of the product did not improve. Fires and explosions continued to ravage both mines, and in 1895 an explosion completely destroyed Newcastle.⁵⁰

The OIC did not outlive its mines. On 4 October 1895 it went into receivership for the second and final time. Charles Smith was appointed Receiver, and the OIC officers took great pains and went into great detail accusing each other for the company's demise. Charges of incompetency and inefficiency appeared from all directions. Charles Smith tried hard to save the company, but without success. Somewhat desperate at the end, the man who worked for so long to have blacks put in the mines ironically accused "Corey and his colored men" for the OIC's grief. According to Smith it was the inefficiency of the black miners that kept costs up, and to

the horrified amazement of the other officers, he began to fire the blacks in 1896. Hobart McNeill, the former Resident Manager of the OIC, was in Seattle when he learned of Smith's action. No longer an OIC employee, he glibly commented, "I thought Smith had exhausted his capacity to do damage out here, but I was mistaken." The OIC and the blacks departed together. In 1896 the Oregon Improvement Company ceased to exist when it was purchased by the Pacific Coast Company.⁵¹

A final question remains: who is to blame? Whom must we judge as the cause of the trouble in the mines? There are a number of likely candidates.

The most obvious of course are the officers of the Oregon Improvement Company, or more generally the leading coal operators of Washington. It would be easy to picture these men as soulless ogres; sometimes it has been difficult not to do so. Reading through the OIC correspondence one is continually struck with the overwhelming concern for profit and personal aggrandizement. Men like John Howard and Hobart McNeill do not elicit much sympathy. To them the mine workers were at best an irritable but necessary factor of production, and at worst the workers were "cattle" and "scum". Howard and McNeill were quite willing to have their men toil long hours hundreds of feet below ground in conditions which almost defy belief, and then "long-yard" their paychecks. Not only were the OIC officers bitterly opposed to unions, the one organization which could ameliorate the lot of the workers, but they also jumped at the opportunity to nurture the poison of racial animosity

within their employees in order to conduct their business more efficiently and economically.

The OIC officers deserve little sympathy, but they can not be entirely condemned. The haphazard nature of Washington mining and the precarious financial position of the OIC forced these men to be vitally concerned about costs and profits. If one accepts the basic tenets of capitalism, then these men were doing a good job, for they let little stand in their way of reducing costs and increasing profits. There is little doubt that the demands of the Knights would have increased costs and added to an already heavy burden for the OIC. In addition, considering the state of mining technology and the nature of coal mining, there was not much the OIC could have done to improve conditions. The OIC did cut corners in regard to safety and comfort, but there were worse offenders, and even an impeccable record would have left coal mining dirty and dangerous work.

If not the coal operators then, are we to lay blame at the feet of the mineworkers, specifically the Knights of Labor? After all, the Knights were agitators; they were aggressive, unconciliatory, and occasionally even violent. They advocated worker solidarity and practiced it by eliminating their competition in the Miners Union and forcing their fellow workers to support their cause. But the worst charge against the Knights is that they were hypocrites, and their hypocrisy helped to eliminate mining unions from Washington for over a decade. The Knights preached racial equality and practiced the virulent

racism so common in the Western United States. According to their literature they were cognizant of the differences between labor and capital, aware that all workers had a good deal in common. Yet, like most white Americans, they could not go beyond their deeply rooted prejudices.

The Knights are probably redeemed simply because they were like most white Americans. They merely reflected the dominant values of the culture into which they were born or had adopted. To most Americans, innate Negro prejudice was not a sensitive subject of discussion, but a simple "fact" of life. Fortunately there were a few who did not believe the "facts", but they were atypical and out of place. To make heroic demands of the Knights, to argue that they should have known better, is a pious and pointless undertaking.

On a less grand scale, the Knights were doing more than debating racial theories; they were defending their jobs and their homes in a highly irregular industry. The OIC imported black workers to force whites to accept lower wages and to replace recalcitrant whites with blacks. Under such circumstances their reaction to the blacks is perhaps not excusable, but it is understandable. Often the Knights' aggression and agitation was defensive in nature. Quite clearly the operators wanted to eliminate all mining unions, and the Knights fought both to save themselves and to protect the interests of the white workers.

Even the black workers are not above scrutiny. Should they not be condemned for allowing themselves to be used as

strikebreakers, cheap labor, and tools of corporate hegemony? When the blacks arrived, they learned that Washington was not free of labor trouble, yet they chose to remain and tacitly contributed to the destruction of the Knights.

These are serious charges, but paradoxically, the blacks deserve at least some respect for their actions. They accepted employment in Washington with the assurance that there was no labor trouble of any kind. When they learned for what purpose they were there, almost all chose to remain, but they did not remain because of a desire to be corporate tools or union busters. The black workers wanted to earn a living and live a responsible life in a society which denied them not only many avenues of employment, but also as many of their rights as possible. In Washington these black men and women decided to stand their ground. They were tired of being used by warring factions, only to be cast aside when their usefulness was spent. The black workers were not docile creatures bowing to the company. They knew why they were there and why they chose to remain.

In the final analysis no fundamental condemnation can be made of any individuals or groups of people. The most we can say is that company officials, Knights, and blacks were all looking out for themselves, perhaps overenthusiastically. But again this enthusiasm reflected the society of which they were a part. As much as cooperation and generosity were admired in nineteenth century America, the traits of success were acquisitiveness and self-interest. In previous pages I have

argued that the structure of mining towns and the nature of coal mining made conflict almost inevitable between coal operators and mine workers. In a parallel manner one could argue that the structure of American society also made conflict likely. With individualism as its foundation and self-interest and acquisitiveness as its driving forces, strife and conflict could not be avoided as more admirable traits were necessarily left by the wayside. Hence when one seeks to fix responsibility for conflict, it is futile to examine only individuals, for the roots of conflict penetrate deeply into the fabric of American society, into values upon which that society was established.

NOTES

1. McNeill to E. Smith, 10 February 1890, OIC Records, 47:34. Senate Bill 68, "An Act relating to the proper ventilation and safety of coal mines," came before the legislature again and this time passed. It went into effect 7 June 1891. See Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 7 June 1891.
2. McNeill to E. Smith, OIC Records, 3 February 1890 (63:11), 10 February 1890 (47:34), 5 March 1890 (48:1), 25 March 1890 (46:17), 21 May 1890 (48:22), 25 July 1890 (48:28).
3. McNeill to E. Smith, 30 July 1890, and 12 June 1890, OIC Records, 46:36 and 40:25; C.J. Smith to E. Smith 8 October 1890, OIC Records, 49:2.
4. Monthly Circular of James and Alexander Brown, 30 September 1890, C.J. Smith to E. Smith, 27 September 1890, OIC Records, 48:36.
5. C.J. Smith to E. Smith 7 October 1890, OIC Records, 49:2; Howard to E. Smith, 9 October 1890, 63:38; OIC Scrapbooks, Box 69.
6. C.J. Smith to E. Smith, 17 October 1890, 23 October 1890, OIC Records, 49:4; Post-Intelligencer, 10 October 1890.
7. Price Cards, OIC Records, 63:36, 63:40; McNeill quoted in Post-Intelligencer, 12 October 1890.
8. Howard to E. Smith, 6 November 1890, 20 November 1890, OIC Records, 64:3 and 64:4; McNeill to C.J. Smith, 18 November 1890, 49:4; J. Simon to P.W. Smith, 27 November 1890, 49:11; J. Simon to Julian Davies, 27 December 1890, 49:19; Post-Intelligencer, 25-27 November 1890.
9. C.J. Smith to E. Smith, 20 December 1890, OIC Records, 49:14; William Starbuck to E. Smith et al., 8 January 1891, 49:19.
10. C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 23 February 1891, OIC Records, 49:27.
11. Ibid, 28 January 1891, 49:20.
12. Ibid; Smith to Starbuck, 23 February 1891, 49:27; Post-Intelligencer, 2 February 1891.
13. The complete text of the contract and the debate between the Knights and the OIC can be found in the 18 May 1891 edition of the Post-Intelligencer.

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid; Post-Intelligencer, 2 April 1891.
17. St. Louis advertisement quoted in Seattle Daily Press-Times, 19 May 1891; see also Post-Intelligencer, 10 April 1891; C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 11 April 1891, 7 May 1891, OIC Records, 49:33 and 50:3.
18. Post-Intelligencer, 23 April 1891; Seattle Times, 16 May 1891.
19. Post-Intelligencer, 22 May 1891; Seattle Times, 16 May 1891.
20. Post-Intelligencer, 17, 18 May 1891; Seattle Times, 18 May 1891; C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 27 May 1891, OIC Records, 50:12. The Post-Intelligencer gave extensive coverage to the events at Franklin in the editions of 17-19 May 1891.
21. Post-Intelligencer, 17, 18 May 1891.
22. Seattle Times, 20 May 1891; Post-Intelligencer, 17, 19 May 1891.
23. Seattle Times, 23 May 1891.
24. C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 27 May 1891, OIC Records, 50:12.
25. Post-Intelligencer, 18, 20 May 1891.
26. Post-Intelligencer, 13 May 1891.
27. Seattle Times, 19 May 1891; Post-Intelligencer, 19, 20, 22 May 1891.
28. C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 27 May 1891, OIC Records, 50:12.
29. Seattle Times, 21, 27 May 1891; Post-Intelligencer, 15, 20 June 1891.
30. Post-Intelligencer, 20, 25 May 1891; Seattle Times, 25 May 1891.
31. Post-Intelligencer, 19 May 1891; Seattle Times 18 May 1891.
32. Post-Intelligencer, 5 July 1891.
33. Post-Intelligencer, 19 May 1891.
34. Seattle Times, 21 May 1891.

35. Seattle Times, 25 May 1891.
36. Quoted in Herbert Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," p. 78.
37. Post-Intelligencer, 28 May, 14 June 1891.
38. Post-Intelligencer, 15 June 1891.
39. Post-Intelligencer, 23, 27 June 1891; C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 5 June 1891, OIC Records, 50:16; Smith to C.B. Tedcastle, 1 July 1891, 50:21.
40. Post-Intelligencer, 29, 30 June 1891; Seattle Times, 30 June 1891; see also C. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 68-71.
41. Post-Intelligencer, 3, 7 July 1891.
42. On the Gilman agreement see Post-Intelligencer, 2, 22 July 1891; for Black Diamond see Ibid, 17, 24 July 1891.
43. C.J. Smith to Starbuck, 4 July 1891, 30 July 1891, and 3 August 1891, OIC Records, 50:22, 50:25 and 50:26; Post-Intelligencer, 21 July 1891.
44. Post-Intelligencer, 4 July 1891.
45. Post-Intelligencer, 10 July 1891.
46. OIC Scrapbooks, Box 69.
47. Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 74; Smith to Starbuck, 25 March 1894, OIC Records, 52:27; C.J. Smith to Tedcastle, 9 May 1894, 52:30; Smith to Starbuck, 2 July, 7 July 1894, 52:37.
48. Richard E. Lingenfelter, The Hardrock Miners: A History of the Mining Labor Movement, 1863-1893 (Berkeley, 1974), p. 220; See also M. Dubsofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism," Labor History 7 (Spring 1966), pp. 131-153; Theodore Allison, "History of the Northwest Mining Unions Through 1920," (M.A. thesis, Washington State University, 1943), p. 1.
49. Frederick Melder, "A Study of the Washington Coal Mining Industry," pp. 63, 66-68; Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," pp. 108-113; Norman Ware, The Labor Movement in the United States, pp. 220-221.

50. Marilyn Tharp, "Story of Coal at Newcastle," p. 126; Thorndale, "Washington's Green River Coal Country," p. 75; C. Smith to Tedcastle, 29 August 1894, OIC Records, 52:42.
51. Artemus Holmes to E. Smith, 7 October 1895, OIC Records, 53:38; T. Corey to E. Smith, 13 July 1896, 53a:9; Frank Kelly to T. Corey, 17 August 1896, 53a:11; McNeill to E. Smith, 17 August 1896, 53a:11.

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APPENDIXPOPULATION OF WASHINGTON AND SEATTLE 1860-1900

TOTALS		WHITE		BLACK		CHINESE		OTHERS	
			%		%		%		%
WASHINGTON		Number	Total	Number	Total	Number	Total	Number	Total
1900	518,103	496,304	95.8	2,514	0.5	3,629	0.7	15,656	3.0
1890	357,232	340,829	95.4	1,602	0.5	3,260	0.9	11,541	3.2
1880	75,116	67,199	89.5	325	0.4	3,186	4.2	4,406	5.9
1870	23,955	22,195	92.7	207	0.9	234	1.0	1,319	5.5
1860	11,594	11,138	96.1	30	0.3	-	-	426	3.6
SEATTLE		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1900	80,671	76,815	95.3	406	0.5	438	0.5	3,012	3.7
1890	42,837	42,056	98.1	286	0.7	359	0.9	136	0.3
1880	3,533	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1870	1,107	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: 13th Census of the U.S. (1910) Population Vol. III pp. 970, 1104.
 12th Census of the U.S. (1900) Population. Part I pp. 562, 570.