

Joint Crisis Committee

# Pitchfork Politics: Gilded Age Farmers



# JACKRABBIT MUN VII

L.B. POLY - MAY 24th, 2025

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# CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

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Hello Delegates!

Hiiii, my name is Elijah! I will be one of your amazing (and handsome) co-chairs for the Gilded Age Farmers crisis room! I joined MUN my junior year and my favorite memory is when I went to Boston for a conference (I loved watching Jujutsu Kaisen late at night with my friends).

I am the Tennis team captain at LB Poly (Djokovic is my goat and Federer sucks!). My favorite shot in tennis is the forehand and practicing my bag swing helped me out so much! I love listening to music like Faye Webster, Geordie Greep, and DoeChii (She deserved that Grammy!). I also like to be mysterious and listen to underground artists like Holdan Sutton (15k listeners a month!).

I love UCLA (Go Bruins!). I look forward to eating their delicious food. I also love watching football but I don't root for any team (I just love the fun of the sport but I HATE the Chiefs.)

Sincerely,

Elijah Wong

JCC: Gilded Age Farmers| Co-Head Chair

[Elijah3211wong@gmail.com](mailto:Elijah3211wong@gmail.com)



# CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

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Hello delegates!

My name is Brynn, and I'm happy to meet you all! I am a Senior at Poly and the Jackrabbit MUN treasurer. I've gained lots of experience that has greatly enhanced my understanding of global issues and honed my public speaking skills. MUN has also provided me with a way to explore my passion for politics and expand my worldview.

Some other things about me are that I am on varsity cross country and track. My favorite event is the 1600m! I am an avid member of the book club and my favorite author is Kurt Vonnegut. My favorite subjects currently are Chemistry and Physics.

I'm eager to hear your thoughts. I am genuinely excited to hear your solutions and engage in meaningful discussions throughout the conference. See you soon!

Sincerely,

Brynn Jolly

JCC: Gilded Age Farmers | Co-Head Chair

[brynn.jolly@gmail.com](mailto:brynn.jolly@gmail.com)



# CRISIS LEAD LETTER

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Hello delegates!

My name is Jackson Trunnelle and I'm going to be your Crisis Lead for the JCC: Gilded Age Farmers room in Jackrabbit MUN VII. I am currently a senior and Co-President for our Model UN program at Long Beach Poly. MUN is a very exciting place where I have been able to explore global policy, consider new ideas, and make great connections with wonderful people who I have had the pleasure of delegating with. Outside of MUN, I play club volleyball and varsity for my high school team, as well as playing pickleball and card games in my free time. At school, I am also involved in VITA Tax Club, Poly Global Fund, and Poly Pickleball Club. I love cookies too (especially Christmas ones) and believe I can make the best cookie butter sandwich you'll ever try.

I am very excited to hear all of the wonderful ideas and creative solutions that will be brought forth, and how through patience, cooperation, and civility, we can strive to make the world a better place. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at my email below!

Sincerely,

Jackson Trunnelle

JCC: Gilded Age Farmers | Crisis Lead

[jctrunnelle@gmail.com](mailto:jctrunnelle@gmail.com)



# VICE CHAIR LETTER

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Hello delegates!

My name is Stephanie Gonzalez and I can't wait to see you all! I am currently a Senior in PACE at Long Beach Poly and have been a member of MUN since Sophomore year. Being in MUN has allowed me to explore and learn more about the world around us while also allowing me to connect with people of different backgrounds and ideas. MUN has also allowed me to come out of my shell and be able to overcome my fear of public-speaking over the years.

Outside of MUN I also do cross country, track and am part of a symphony orchestra! While at times it is a lot to juggle I wouldn't trade my activities for anything else as they have given me so many good memories to look back on. During my free time I am also an avid reader with long fantasy books being my favorite (some might say too long).

I can't wait to see what ideas and solutions you guys will have during our time together at the conference. Being able to see solutions that can potentially change the world for the better is something I am always eager to hear about. Remember to take a deep breath and raise that placard nice and high! Best of luck and see you soon!

Sincerely,

Stephanie

JCC: Gilded Age Farmers | Vice Chair

[LOsoppheg97@gmail.com](mailto:LOsoppheg97@gmail.com)



# POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

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- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 18th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers will be submitted through a google form:
  - <https://forms.gle/jkenWafGEAL6hJay9>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.

John Muir  
First Last  
School Name  
JCC: Gilded Age Farmers
- Papers should be submitted as a PDF file
  - Please name the file [Committee\_Country]
    - Ex. **JCC Farmers\_John Muir**
- Papers should be minimum 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
  - Background
  - Position of your Character
  - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



# COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

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**The date is February 8, 1895.** The United States, amid a financial crisis as a result of the Panic of 1893, is in trouble. Due to a multitude of reasons, the treasury is slowly losing gold. Full depletion would spell the collapse of the dollar. In a shocking act of benevolence (or sly manipulation), one of the richest men in America, J.P Morgan has facilitated an agreement with U.S. President Grover Cleveland Wall Street to sell 3.5 million ounces of gold to the government in exchange for a 30-year bond issue.

While this isn't a permanent solution, the upper class's influence has temporarily averted a full-blown economic crisis. Yet for the farmers and urban laborers, this intervention represents another stark reminder of their powerlessness in a country where the wealthy can manipulate the economy at will. The government's apparent subservience to wealthy industrialists has intensified calls for radical reform. Farmers and laborers, who form the backbone of the American economy, feel betrayed by a system that prioritizes the interests of a few wealthy elites over the survival of millions of hardworking citizens. As tensions rise between the powerful elite and the disillusioned working class, you must fight back against the crooked demands of the wealthy by advocating for justice and regulation for the common people.



# TOPIC SYNOPSIS

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Farmers have always been the backbone of American society—they are its “most valuable citizens,” according to Thomas Jefferson. But now, you’re under attack. Mass industrialization, spearheaded by greedy robber barons like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, spells the end of your way of life. At this rate, massive industrial monopolies will supplant farmers altogether, forcing you off the land your families have worked for generations and into the factories. In the cities, many of your fellow workingmen have already been subjected to industrialist tyranny. Those corporate villains won’t just stop at undercutting crop prices through overproduction. They seek to subvert democracy itself by sending their “lobbyists” to bribe the money-hungry men of Washington. Thus, pleading to the government always falls on deaf ears. Politicians follow their pocketbooks, not the public good. But today, there is revolution in the air. Farmers and working men from all corners of America have gathered together to plan and strategize—to break the chains of the despotic industrialists.

Because this is one half of a Joint Crisis Committee, you’ll be positioned against the “Captains Of Industry” (or Robber Barons) room. Those Machiavellian profiteers will be doing all they can to crush you under the boot while lining their pockets with the fruits of your labor. You must collaborate with other members of the working class to ensure that doesn’t happen and protect your way of life—the American way of life. Watch your backs. Those corporate bloodsuckers never fail to play dirty, and there may be class traitors within your midst...



# BACKGROUND

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## BACKGROUND TO THE GILDED AGE

During the late nineteenth century, many American settlers and immigrants began to move westward for a multitude of reasons, many of which were made possible through industrialization. Railroads, specifically, paved the way for western settlements and the growing international market. The use of railroads allowed meat, materials, and crops to be shipped around the United States.

The American government sought to incentivize westward expansion and enacted the Homestead Act of 1862, which granted 160 acres of unclaimed western land to US citizens who pledged to settle and cultivate the land for at least five years. Millions of claims were made as people hurried westward in order to take land for themselves. The Homestead Act did increase westward expansion, but those who claimed ownership of the land were mostly not the small farmers that Congress hoped to help. Though the land itself was free, purchasing the equipment and resources necessary to maintain a farm could be quite expensive. Thus, most of the plots went instead to railroad companies, speculators, cattle owners, miners, and loggers, who had already amassed enough wealth to maintain it. Only 16% of the land made available by the government went to homesteaders.

Industrialization not only changed the movement of farmers—it also affected their work. The invention and improvement of farming machinery, such as the twin binder and gasoline tractor, led to an increase in planting and farming crops. These tools used less manual labor, increasing the amount of profit farmers made through



selling crops, but decreasing the availability of work.

During the late nineteenth century, farmers also had to battle the unfair corporate monopolies and government policies aimed specifically towards profiting off of farmers. An example of this was the practice of “rate hiking” by railroad companies, where farmers were charged extremely high rates to transport goods. Additionally, the tools and materials used by farmers, such as fertilizer and farming machines, often had their prices raised drastically and in tandem so farmers had no choice but to buy the overpriced goods.

## **RISE OF THE INDEPENDENT FARMER & THE SECOND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

The Second Industrial Revolution, which began in 1870, was defined by rapid industrial development spurred by advances in large-scale production of iron and steel. The introduction of the Bessemer Process in 1856 allowed for mass steel production, meaning that railways could be constructed at a lowered cost. The railroad industry exploded, thanks in large part to legislation like the Pacific Railway Act of 1862 (which authorized the construction of the first transcontinental railroad) and land grants for the sole purpose of building tracks. This would prove to be wildly beneficial for the American economy, as the expansion of the railroad system fostered a national market through the connection of rural and urban centers. Other inventions such as the telephone, lightbulb, plane, and telegraph also contributed to an economic boom. Industries grew at a rapid rate, contributing to the idea of “industrial capitalism,” defined as the dominance of industrialists in the economy through practices like



monopolies and trusts. This idea only grew in power as the government instituted *laissez-faire* (abstention by the government in the market) policies, which did little to discourage corporations from growing explosively.

Although industrialists were the greatest beneficiaries of the Second Industrial Revolution, that period also gave rise to the independent farmer. New tools and machinery, as well as the use of chemical fertilizers, improved efficiency and overall production. In the past, farmers produced crops largely for their own consumption (also known as subsistence farming), or in small amounts for local sale. With the expansion of railways, however, previously isolated farmers had access to untapped markets.

However, this era of industrialization also came at a cost to farmers, as they now competed in a world market where producing a variety of crops was no longer economically viable. Instead of growing a multitude of crops for food and selling surplus, they began to focus on planting and harvesting a single “cash crop,” such as wheat or corn. Many farmers could no longer operate as self-sufficient and were forced to become more dependent on the market, as purchasing the commodities became cheaper than producing them domestically. Because so many farmers chose to specialize, they would collectively produce massive amounts of the same crop, leading to a surplus in the market. With this change, farmers were more akin to entrepreneurs who benefited from industrial advancements, although this also forced them to adopt new financial tactics.

Agricultural technologies such as mechanical reapers, seed drills, and steel plows were expensive but essential to farmers who wished to be competitive.



Consequently, many farmers took out large loans to pay for this machinery, and as a result, fell into debt. Additionally, although many farmers owned land debt-free, many still felt the need to expand. This, too, required taking out loans. The prevalence of small farmers taking out heavy loans helps to explain why they suffered so greatly during the financial crises of the 1890s.

## **OBSTACLES TO FARMER LIFE**

The life of a farmer was exceedingly difficult, thanks in no small part to numerous economic struggles. These were partially brought on by the gold standard—a monetary system that tied the country’s currency to a set amount of gold. Under it, paper money was valued by its potential to be exchanged for a predetermined amount of gold (i.e., if the price of gold is \$20/ounce, one ounce of gold can be exchanged for a \$20 bill). In 1834, the US switched to the gold standard. This was seen as a way to curtail inflation and stabilize prices, as governments and banks would be unable to affect the money supply by printing more bills due to a largely fixed quantity of gold.

At the same time, however, the limited supply of gold constrained the money supply as the economy continued to grow. Eventually, the supply of goods and services outgrew the supply of money, causing deflation. For farmers, this resulted in their crop prices dropping dramatically. The price of a bushel of wheat decreased nearly 60%, from \$1.07 in 1870 to \$.63 by 1895. The price of cotton plummeted from \$.15/lb in the 1860s to under \$.06/lb in the 1890s—which devastated Southern farmers, who relied on cotton as their main cash crop. Farmers were forced to sell more than double the crops to make the same amount of money.



In addition to falling crop prices, many farmers also fell deep into debt, whether because of local stores from which they bought supplies with credit, or because of the railroads that charged exorbitant rates to ship their produce. With railroads in particular, rate discrimination was a major issue, as farmers had no choice but to use railroads to transport their goods. One of the most notable forms of rate discrimination was the “short-haul/long haul,” where railroads charged a higher price per mile for transportation over a short distance versus a long one. This favored large producers (such as Standard Oil or grain elevators) that shipped over long distances over farmers who shipped their goods to local markets. In the 1870s, Granger Laws in Midwestern states attempted to regulate the rates offered by railroads, though they were overturned in the 1866 Supreme Court case *Wabash v. Illinois*, in which the Court ruled that states could not regulate interstate commerce. These exploitative practices led to widespread resentment and calls for regulation, culminating in the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, which established a framework for how railroads could do business. Its aim was to promote competition and prevent the usage of unfair monopolies by lowering standard prices. This law was especially popular with farmers who relied on railroads to ship their crops across the West in order to sell and make a profit. In order to oversee the railroad industry, the federal government required companies to send annual reports to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to determine the fairness of costs. Unfortunately for the farmer, enforcement of these guidelines was limited due to the necessity to prove that rates were, indeed, discriminatory. Large railroad corporations with well-funded legal teams often found ways to circumvent regulations.



The farmers' response to this was to increase crop production in the hopes of earning enough money to overcome these expenses. This effort proved to be futile for the majority of farmers, however, and instead had negative results, as the value of their products went down due to overproduction. This, coupled with deflation increasing the real value of their loans, left farmers in crippling debt.

Many farmers believed the solution to their plight could be found in bimetallism, which allowed unrestricted currency of both gold and silver. The “Free Silver Movement” advocated for the unlimited coinage of silver, believing that increasing the amount of money would stabilize the market and increase the price of their crops. The movement gained traction due to an economic depression in the mid-1870s. It saw its first major success with the Bland-Allison Act of 1878, which mandated the Secretary of the Treasury to purchase at least \$2 million in silver bullion per month to coin into currency. Prices saw improvement in the short term, when farm and land prices collapsed again in 1887, the demand for the unlimited coinage of silver was revived. Congress responded with the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1889, increasing the government’s monthly acquisition of silver by 50%. This was largely opposed by bankers and wealthy industrialists, who feared an expanded money supply would devalue the dollar and make loans less profitable.

Just four years later, the Panic of 1893 occurred. In one of the most severe economic depressions in U.S. history, roughly 575 banks suspended operations or failed entirely. This panic led to bank runs, where depositors rushed to withdraw their funds, and banks emptied of cash collapsed. Anyone with money stored in the banks lost everything. Farmers who had struggled to make ends meet were pushed into



bankruptcy. Unable to pay off their mortgages, many lost their land altogether. Some blamed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act to be the primary cause of the Panic, having inadvertently drained the U.S. gold supply by allowing people to exchange silver-backed notes for gold. Concurrently, the increased silver production caused its price on the open market to plummet. Investors, fearing the abandonment of the gold standard, began withdrawing gold en masse, depleting the reserves. President Grover Cleveland repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in an attempt to stop the bleeding, but the damage was already done. This panic galvanized support for the Populist Party, which called for monetary reform, as well as increased regulation to protect farmers and workers from exploitation.

## **OBSTACLES OF URBAN LABORERS**

The life of an urban laborer in the Gilded Age was characterized by low wages, long hours, and dangerous working conditions. Industrialization had transformed cities into booming economic centers, but the workers who made it all possible were suffering. Laborers commonly could be found working 16-hour days with little pay. In 1890, the average daily wage for a manufacturing worker was around \$1.50 (about \$52.02 today and \$16,230 annually if assuming a six day work week). Rapid mechanization played a part in low wages as well. In textile factories, for example, by the 1870s, machines were knitting stockings, stitching shoes, and cutting leather. Skilled workers, once a commodity, found their work devalued by the machine. The ability to negotiate wages based on skill was no longer available, as employers could hire unskilled workers to operate these machines for cheap. These workers were easily



replaceable and had little leverage to demand better working conditions or pay. This influx of unskilled workers only increased as factory systems and assembly lines became commonplace.

With no ability to bargain, employers subjected workers to heinous working conditions. Factories were poorly ventilated, overcrowded, and stuffed to the brim with large machinery. The conditions were even worse for railway workers. One in every 35 were injured each year, and one out of every 117 died.

This era saw children suffering in the workforce as well. In 1890, only about 45% of American workers were above the poverty level, with the average earning \$13/week in modern prices. Because of this, children were made to contribute during these harrowing times. By the mid-1890s, it was estimated that 1 out of every 5 children was working. Due to their small size, children were tasked with working in small, dangerous spaces and often lost fingers, hands, or legs. Despite this risk, children often were not paid at all, with their wages going to their parents instead. Even if they were paid, their salary was 10-20% of what an adult would make.



The harsh realities of child labor were just one aspect of the broader struggle for workers' rights. Another was the violent clashes between law enforcement backed by industrialists and workers. The Haymarket Affair was a violent confrontation between police and labor protesters in May of 1886. Haymarket Square had been filled with peaceful protests that started on May Day, but after police tried to force the crowds to disperse, a bomb was allegedly thrown in the direction of the police. The police immediately fired on the strikers, the strikers fired back, and eleven died on that day alone with 70 or more wounded. The violence of the Haymarket Affair left a lasting impact on labor movements, with many facing public backlash and scrutiny. Despite this, unrest was still widespread. In 1894, the Pullman Strike began after the Pullman Company cut wages without lowering the cost of living in the workers' company-owned housing. The American Railway Union (ARU) went on strike, resulting in a national railroad boycott. The federal government was forced to intervene by sending troops to break up the rally, which quickly escalated and resulted in over 30 deaths.

Tensions between laborers and their employers were at an all-time high over issues like wages, hours, and working conditions. This bolstered labor unions such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Regarded as the most successful labor organization of the era, the AFL focused on skilled workers, as they were harder to replace and gave unions greater bargaining power. They focused on higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions. Compared to the ARU, the AFL found more success in a more diplomatic approach, favoring negotiation over confrontation.



By the late 19th century, AFL unions had won wage increases in over half their labor and organized over 1,000 successful strikes. By 1895, the AFL was far and away the most effective labor organization in the United States. However, its exclusion of unskilled workers, women, and minorities prevented many from sharing in its success.

## **FARMERS IN POLITICS**

As the industrial age took the U.S. by storm, millionaires rose to prominence, and along with them, political corruption. During the late 19th century, about 20% of the nation's wealth was held by only 4,000 millionaires. With their great wealth, millionaires possessed significant influence such as being able to “buy” supporters, specifically politicians.

As the rich continued to amass wealth, the poor, comprised of mostly laborers and farmers, continued to lose money. Farmers were experiencing a drop in the prices of their crops as they battled high tariffs and contended with foreign competition. These collective struggles aroused organized resistance, with one of the first major rural movements being the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange. Founded in 1867 by Oliver Hudson Kelly, this movement gained roughly 1.5 million members by 1875. The Granger Movement involved farmers pooling resources in order to afford costly shipping rates and gain better prices for other necessities.

During this time, the Granger Movement attempted to pass laws to keep monopolies and railroads in check. These were known as the “Granger Cases”, and many were brought before the Supreme Court. These laws did not accomplish much, however, as most of them were either denied or never fully enforced, and thus failed to



provide farmers relief from their monetary struggles. These failures caused the rise of other rural movements such as the Greenback Party, which tried to add unbacked currency (“Greenbacks”) into circulation. Unfortunately for the farmers, it also collapsed.

Throughout the Gilded Age, the number of unchecked monopolies and people that were not content with unfair wages and working conditions increased. As a result, more unions, strikes, and political parties were formed during this time to try to advocate for the interests of all. One prominent movement was the People’s Party, also known as the Populist Party, which advocated for public railroads, improved working conditions, and fair transportation prices for farmers. These goals were similar to those of other rural parties across the nation.

Another movement, the Knights of Labor, rose in popularity during this time. This party was comprised of both skilled and unskilled laborers with the goal of improving the quality of life, both socially and economically, for the working class. Some of their notable goals included advocating for the 8-hour workday and introducing a system where laborers owned industries, rather than wealthy elites.

In the mid-1870s, a new movement, the Farmers’ Alliance, made waves, originating in Texas and spreading to the South and Midwest. This agrarian alliance combatted many of the farmers' struggles through methods similar to the Patrons of Husbandry, where cooperative stores, mills, and warehouses were set up with affordable prices for farmers. This party pushed for the government to own and regulate railroad companies, establish government warehouses for farmers to deposit their crops, and lower tariffs. Despite the unionization efforts of farmers, no group



was able to make long-term, impactful changes to the American economy or labor conditions.

## **POTENTIAL CONFLICT**

In 1892, steel millionaire Andrew Carnegie cut wages en masse and fired thousands of workers from the Homestead Steel Mill in Pennsylvania. The workers responded with the infamous Homestead Strike. Workers fired guns and cannons at the private security guards of the factory and killed several Pinkertons—members of a private police force often hired to break up strikes and labor unions. While the strike was brutally suppressed, it made national headlines and was seen as a major turning point in the US labor movement. The incident gave significant political boosts to the Populist Party, which was led by James Weaver in the 1892 presidential campaign.

The Farmers' Alliance, in collaboration with the Grange Movement, pushed for the end of the sharecropping system that kept Black and white farmers alike in poverty after the end of the Civil War. By 1893, their main goals were to increase the money supply, gain a graduated income tax, and be able to use crops as collateral for loans.

By the mid-1890s, the Populist Party, which was led by Thomas E. Watson, Terence V. Powderly, and Eugene Debs, was a vocal advocate for the “common man.” They supported the free silver movement, believing it would expand the money supply and help farmers acquire land or escape debt to large landowners.

In 1893, economic slowdown led to increased loan defaults and weakened bank balance sheets, which resulted in the Panic of 1893. In order to ameliorate the situation, millionaire J.P. Morgan and his network of American bankers organized



investments and used lines of credit as collateral to right the nation's economy. This influx of money was able to close the recessionary gap.

While many were optimistic about the improvement of the U.S. economy, others were worried about how this growth of wealth would increase the power and influence of industrialists, further exploiting the rights and liberties of the lower classes. As a result, many labor organizations, such as the AFL and the National Farmers Alliance, are vigorously fighting in Washington to push for the ability to collectively bargain for better working conditions, shorter working hours, paid time off (primarily for maternal care as maternity leave was often nonexistent at this time), and more benefits such as paid doctors visits or medical insurance.



# COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

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This committee will begin on **February 8th, 1895**. As delegates, you will receive various crisis updates throughout committee, where our dais or crisis staff will deliver new information pertinent to the events of committee. Time jumps may occur. **Since this committee begins on February 8th, 1895 we understand that critical events within several character's lives may not yet have occurred, and some information has not yet been revealed to the public. Nonetheless, please abide by your character's original historical timeline. Also, this committee is set in an alternate timeline, and any character actions may diverge from the historical timeline.** We recommend making a basic timeline for your character that you can refer to during debate.

When it comes to directives, we allow group (also known as joint private), personal, and committee directives, as well as communiques and press releases.

At JackrabbitMUN we use a digital directive system, so you will submit your directives via a Google Form and get responses from Crisis Staff in a digital crisis notebook (a Google Doc). This decreases response time, allowing delegates to submit far more directives—at previous JackrabbitMUN editions we've averaged a response time of less than ten minutes. Committee directives should be written on a Google Doc and shared with the Chair, who will send them to the Crisis Staff.

In addition, on the day of the conference, you will be given a folder with a portfolio power. These portfolio powers are secret—only you will know what your portfolio power is—and include two major things: plots and powers. Plots are secret



objectives a delegate is trying to accomplish or secret information that only one delegate or a group of delegates would be privy to. For instance, an example of a plot is how in our past “Red Scare” room, multiple delegates were Communists and plotted with each other to overthrow the United States. Powers are special actions that delegates can take. These can range from the ability to “OBJECT!” to another delegate’s speech to a secret task force of spies and analysts that a delegate can command to gather intelligence on their adversaries to the ability to call a general strike and cripple key infrastructure.

We at Jackrabbit MUN are aware of harmful events that occurred during the time of the Gilded Age. We do not condone any of these events, but we encourage engaging and nuanced debate and decision-making to further the goals of your character. **However, actions such as genocide, hate speech, racism, xenophobia, and sexism are forbidden under any circumstance, even if they are accurate to beliefs of the time period.** We are approaching the Gilded Age with 21st-century values, and failure to recognize this will result in penalties ranging from verbal reprimands to bans from JackrabbitMUN.

Please be advised that at JackrabbitMUN we have a policy of not killing your fellow delegates. Therefore, please do not submit directives attempting to assassinate one another. We also will not entertain directives that involve genocide or nuclear weapons. Thank you so much for signing up and we look forward to meeting you on the 19th!



# CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

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## **James B. Weaver**

James B. Weaver (born 1833) is an American politician who advocates for the rights of farmers and laborers. A Union veteran of the Civil War and a former Republican, Weaver became a leading figure of the Greenback Party and plays a significant role in the developing Populist movement. During the 1892 presidential election, Weaver was the Populist Party's candidate and garnered over a million votes, 8.5% of the total. Weaver is a supporter of reforming the monetary system because he thinks that the money supply should be increased to ease farmers' debts. He is also an advocate of the Free Silver movement. He was elected to Congress three times and supported legislation such as the establishment of a Department of Labor, the publicization of railroads, and the opening of Indian Territory to white settlement. Weaver's political career has been replete with efforts in the direction of righting economic inequalities, support for the Farmers' Alliance, and participation in the elaboration of the program of the Populist Party—which has demanded a graduated income tax, government control of railroads, and direct election of senators. With a fiery tone, he contributes a unique fierceness to the Populist movement.

## **Eugene V. Debs**

Born in Terre Haute, Indiana, to German immigrant parents, Debs began his career as a labor organizer for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. In 1893, he founded the



first industrial union, the American Railway Union, and appointed himself the president. He rose to national prominence for his role in the Chicago Pullman Palace Car Company strike that resulted in his imprisonment. During his time in prison, he began to study socialism. The downtime allowed him to ponder the rejection of capitalism in favor of a more equitable economic system. Debs is known for being a principled and charismatic leader and a loud voice in the movement advocating for workers' rights. He champions a complete restructuring of American society in order to ensure fairness for all.

### **William Jennings Bryan**

William Jennings Bryan was born on March 19, 1860, in Salem, Illinois. Later on, he would grow up to become a Democratic Populist Leader, becoming a key figure in advocating for the agricultural and working-class people. During his time as a Populist leader, he especially aimed to improve the conditions of farmers and agrarian workers, favoring these people especially as he was from the Midwest. Bryan is known as a gifted debater and a popular public lecturer, and is fast rising in popularity and status within the Populist Party.

### **Lincoln Steffens**

Lincoln Steffens (born 1866) is an American investigative journalist and one of the most famous muckrakers of the Progressive Era. At the age of 29, he was well accomplished in American journalism and politics. He is best known for his work exposing corruption in American municipal governments. He currently works on detailed



investigations of governmental and political corruption with a style that engages his reader through comic irony rather than moral indignation. It was this approach that challenges popular dogmas connecting economic success with moral worth, and his works are no doubt instrumental in raising the public's awareness about political corruption and urban problems. With his name coming into the national spotlight, Steffens is fast becoming a central figure in shaping public opinion and contributing to broader Progressive Era reforms. As his commitment to investigative journalism grows, so does his willingness to challenge the status quo.

### **Samuel Gompers**

Born to a Jewish family in Amsterdam, Gompers immigrated to the United States at 13 and settled in New York City in 1886. He founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and currently serves as its president. Gompers seeks to improve the wages, hours, and conditions of American workers, establishing the AFL as one of the nation's largest labor unions. He is known for his pragmatic approach to organized labor, advocating for strikes and boycotts to achieve better working conditions. He's largely distrustful of intellectual reformers and prefers to focus on practical economic goals rather than idealistic solutions. He faces criticism from more radical factions within the movement for his cautious and conciliatory stance towards capitalism.

### **Terence V Powderly**

Terence V Powderly was born on January 22, 1849, in Carbondale, Pennsylvania. At 13 years old, Powderly was already in hard manual labor as a railroad worker. After facing



years of unfair labor conditions, he joined the Machinist and Blacksmith's Union and, eventually, the Knights of Labour. He quickly rose to the union's highest rank, Grand Master Workman, and saw this as an opportunity to advocate for the rights of the exploited lower class, especially industrial employees. Powderly's ultimate goal is for the laborers to own the industries they power, not millionaires, to gain better wages and hours for the working people. Terence Powderly has become a leader known for his peaceful advocations, believing in negotiating with words rather than fighting with violence when it comes to discussing middle class people's rights and conditions.

### **Florence Kelley**

Born in Philadelphia to an affluent family, Florence Kelley's father was a judge and abolitionist, which exposed her to social issues at a young age. From childhood, she expressed interest in women's rights, pursuing her education at Cornell, then later at the University of Zurich. It was in Zurich that she became interested in socialism and labor reform. Since her return to the United States, she became the first female Chief Factory Inspector in Illinois and more recently worked with the Hull House, where she has been hired to investigate Chicago's labor industry. This year, she graduated with a law degree from Northwestern, and is eager to put her newfound legal knowledge to good use. Characterized by determination and an intrinsic sense of justice, Kelley seeks to use her passion and the privilege of her education to fight for laborers in sweatshops and other industrial workplaces.



## **John Muir**

Born in Scotland, John Muir is a renowned American naturalist, writer, and aggressive advocate of U.S. forest conservation. He formerly worked on mechanical inventions, but after almost losing an eye during his job, he decided to quit and dedicate more of his life towards nature. After walking all over the Pacific Coast and West side of the United States, he's become an avid appreciator of nature, especially grand forests. He regularly tries to convince the federal government to install a Forest Conservation Policy, mainly through articles and his written works. Muir aims to completely protect natural and forested areas, which means that industries will not be able to use as many natural resources. So as long as a political party does not aim to overuse the lands and forests, support for it can always be found when it comes to John Muir.

## **Bill Heywood**

Born in 1869, Big Bill Heywood built a reputation as an instrumental American labor leader, particularly since he is a founding member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and part of the executive committee of the Socialist Party of America. With little-to-no education, Heywood began working in the mines at age fifteen. However, major events like the Haymarket Massacre and the Pullman Strike sparked his interest in the labor movement. Heywood is a Marxist and represents the Socialist Party as a delegate working towards international socialism, but his campaigns with the IWW to abolish the wage system and overthrow capitalism are creating tension with the Socialist Party, and the government has its eye on him. Heywood believes the system is unjust towards the working class and is angered by the arrogance of



millionaire employers. His philosophy was formed through the grueling work of laborers, as it was best understood as the ability to translate complicated economic theories into simple ideas that matched the thoughts of working people.

### **Emma Goldman**

Emma Goldman was born in Lithuania to Jewish parents. In 1885, she immigrated to the U.S. at 16 years old. After the Haymarket Affair, Goldman developed the belief that anarchism is the only way to successfully ensure an equitable world. She has become a prolific political activist who does not shy away from the use of violence as she deems necessary. At one point, she, allegedly, planned to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, manager of Homestead Steel Plant. Goldman is characterized by her passionate and outspoken nature, as a champion of women's rights, free love, free education, and worker's rights. She is playing a significant role in the development of anarchist thought and the popularity of anarchism, and challenges the status quo in all facets of her life. Despite large amounts of criticism, she remains steadfast in her belief that total social change is necessary for true freedom- even if this change requires *drastic* measures.

### **Richard Trevellick**

Born in Chicago, Trevellick started his career as a ship's carpenter, during which he became involved with labor activism. In the 1860s, he emerged as an organizer for the National Labor Union (NLU). The NLU was one of the first attempts to unite workers across different industries. He is known as a skilled orator and champion against



corporate exploitation, and is a noted advocate for the eight-hour workday. His ability to connect with industrial and rural laborers, along with his unwavering commitment to labor rights, has made him one of the leading figures in the urban labor movement in the Midwest. With his firm dedication to securing the rights of workers, he has gained much support and is seen as a tireless advocate for economic justice. He seeks to unite workers in the battle against the growing influence of monopolistic corporations.

### **Jane Addams**

Jane Addams was born on September 6, 1860, in Cedarville, Illinois, and became one of the biggest advocates for immigrants and the working class. After witnessing the mistreatment of and lack of resources for immigrants and working people, Addams opened the Hull House, dedicating her life to social justice. Addams urges social elites to assist the lower classes, advocates that powerful corporations should stop blocking legislations that help to improve the lives of workers, and supports unions that want to end child labor. Jane Addams, along with the women leading the Hull House, will continue to dedicate her time towards helping the working class people, especially farmers, from the shackles of the corrupted millionaires who think they can run this country into the ground.

### **Mary Harris Jones**

Mary Harris Jones is one of the most famous female labor activists because of her oratory skills and staunch advocacy for the working class. Born on August 1, 1837, in



County Cork, Ireland. Jones immigrated to Chicago and became a teacher and seamstress. Following the tragic loss of her husband and children, she focused her full attention on fearlessly fighting for working-class people's rights, especially railroad workers. She became an organizer for the Knights of Labor and United Mine Workers, leading picketing strikes and rousing large crowds who were drawn to her charismatic leadership. Due to her aggressive advocacy for better wages and hours, Jones is famous amongst the workers and infamous among the millionaires who oppress them. Jones has found increasing success as a labor organizer and achieved the workers better pay. Yet this is not enough for her. Her rhetoric has recently become increasingly militant as the rich continue stuffing their pockets by exacerbating the suffering of the poor. Today, Jones continues to use her voice to advocate for workers, and is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve the true liberation of the working class.

### **Ida Tarbell**

Ida Tarbell was born in 1857 in Hatch Hollow, Pennsylvania, and is widely renowned for journalistic skill. Growing up, Tarbell was acutely aware of the social problems within her state and America as a whole. She has tried to improve them all her life, and she is currently seeking to take down large industries because of their corrupt, monopolistic practices. She's currently known as a public advocate for better rights for middle class workers and farmers—but she tends to take more precautions when investigating larger organizations. Despite the risks of revealing this corruption, Tarbell will not rest until the day comes when farmers fear their exploitation at the hands of the American elite no longer.



## **Booker T. Washington**

Born into enslavement in 1856, Washington rose to prominence as the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, a vocational school with the purpose of providing Black Americans with practical skills. He believed that self-sufficiency is key to achieving racial equality in a segregated America. Washington is a charismatic orator—he is able to connect with both Black and white audiences and thus gain support from powerful figures. For Black farmers specifically, Washington believes that agriculture is a critical area where African Americans, especially in the South, could achieve stability and independence. He encourages farmers to embrace new agricultural techniques and improve their crop production methods through technology.

## **Jacob Riis**

Jacob Riis, born in Denmark in 1849, rose to popularity through his many photos of the crowded New York slums, overworked factory employees, and industrial child workers. He is a well-known American newspaper reporter, photographer, and social reformer who advocates for better treatment of immigrants and poor working class people in factories, especially children. Through his photos and reporting, Riis was able to bring to light the horrible conditions people were living in in New York, becoming one of the key figures when it came to muckraking journalism. Jacob Riis has dedicated his skills to fiercely advocating for immediate economic reform.



## **John Sherman**

Born in Ohio to a family of public servants, John Sherman began his career as a lawyer before transitioning to politics. He served in both houses of Congress, as Secretary of the Treasury, and briefly as Secretary of State. He is known for his financial expertise and the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. He consistently advocates for sound monetary policies, including a return to the gold standard. Sherman believes greenbacks and other inflationary measures are unnecessary for the economy. He is known for his attention to detail, conservative financial views, and his ability to navigate tense political situations.

## **W.E.B. Du Bois**

Born in Massachusetts into a predominantly white community, DuBois is the first Black person to earn a PhD from Harvard University. While Du Bois largely focuses on the socioeconomics of the Black community, he also advocates for the rights of Black workers, arguing that true reform must address both racial and economic inequalities. He believes in the power of education as a way to combat racism and prefers to push for social change through scholarly means. Du Bois is committed to helping keep farmers independent of the corrupted elites, especially Black farmers, through his thorough interviews and newspaper writings, revealing the mistreatment of low-middle working class and farmers and advocating passionately for a better future.



## **Mary Elizabeth Lease**

Born to Irish immigrants in the Pennsylvania countryside, Mary Lease is a school teacher-turned-writer and political activist. Lease joined a public speaking tour for the Irish National Land League in 1885. She then joined the Socialist Labor Party in 1888 to attempt to improve farmer and labor rights. In 1891 she was elected to the local Knights of Labor assembly. Lease is a strong advocate for workers' rights and believed big business turned people into “wage slaves.” She is often quoted for saying “Wall street owns the country... The people are at bay; let the bloodhounds of money who dogged us thus far beware.” Those Captains of Industry should certainly be afeared.

## **Ignatius Donnelly**

Born in Philadelphia, Donnelly is an outspoken champion of farmers' rights. Though not born a farmer, he has become deeply involved in agrarian causes. He once attempted to engage in large-scale farming, but failed miserably, doomed by the Panic of 1857. Donnelly would act as the Grange lecturer, publishing the “Facts for the Granges.” He served in the Minnesota state legislature, where he pushed for legislation that would benefit farmers, going on to help draft the 1892 Populist Platform. His writings consistently portrayed farmers as victims of a conspiracy by railroad owners, bankers, and big businessmen. His experience as a failed farmer gave him a unique perspective when paired with his writing. A dedicated reformer, Donnelly shaped the 1892 Populist platform, pushing for practical solutions like the nationalization of the railroads or expanding the currency, in hopes of easing burdens on farmers. With his



voice, he is a key supporter of rural America, seeking to level the playing field between farmers and big business owners.

### **Charles William Macune**

Growing up in a farming community in Wisconsin, Macune rose to prominence within the Farmers' Alliance, becoming president in 1887. He worked hard to develop economic initiatives to improve farmers' lives. He's most known for the Sub Treasury Plan, a proposal for government warehouses to provide low-interest loans to farmers. He's also known as a skilled orator, often seeking practical economic solutions to solve farmers' grievances. A former pharmacist and newspaper editor, Macune combines intellect with experience, which has shaped his leadership style. He strongly believes in economic self-sufficiency as the solution for farmers, rather than reliance on outside forces. His background in medicine and publishing reflects his analytical nature along with an ability to communicate complex ideas. Even as politics shift, Macune remains committed to finding pragmatic solutions to farmer's struggles.

### **Thomas E. Watson**

Thomas E. Watson is an exceptionally charismatic and forceful leader in the realm of American politics, especially within the Populist movement. Born in Thomson, Georgia, on September 5, 1856, he has been a lawyer, publisher, and writer. He served both in the Georgia House of Representatives and the U.S. House of Representatives. Because he is one of the primary leaders of the Populist Party, he advocates for poor farmers' rights, agrarian reform, and the destruction of the hegemony that big



business and banking hold. Watson is an outstanding orator who urged the union of impoverished farmers of all races to pass a variety of policies, from the free coinage of silver to the government regulation of railroads. Through his periodicals, "The Jeffersonian" and "Watson's Magazine," Watson promotes Populist causes and criticisms of the status quo.

### **Annie Le Porte Diggs**

A Canadian-born American political activist and suffragist, Diggs has worked for women's suffrage since the 1880s, notably being the president of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association. She also became the chairman of the Washington D.C. delegation at the National People's Party Convention in 1892, making her the first woman to lead a delegation at a national political convention. Diggs played a central role in transforming the Kansas Farmers' Alliance into a political party, especially crucial during the recent 1894 Populist election campaign. Throughout her life, Diggs has played a significant role within her community to fight for an equal representation of the underrepresented, so she is equally content when fighting for the vote for women and fighting monopolies.

### **Thomas Nast**

Thomas Nast is a muckraking cartoonist and journalist famous for his contributions to American political and cultural life. He uses his colorful and bold techniques to popularize many American symbols, such as the Democratic Party Donkey, Uncle Sam, and Republican elephant. As a result of his childhood, he has held sympathy for the



immigrants of America throughout the strong wave of immigration of the mid-19th century, and his cartoons and articles reflect this. Nast's prominent cartoons ruffle the feathers of Republicans, Democrats, and Populists alike, but he is staunchly anti-industrialist and previously drew the corruption of Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall. If he chooses to ally with Populists, however, his revolutionary messages will be crucial in taking down the robber barons.

### **John McBride**

John McBride is an American labor union leader, currently the second president of the American Federation of Labor. McBride's father was a mining supervisor, and McBride himself began working in mines at eight years old: first as a water carrier, then a miner at twelve. In 1870, he joined the Ohio Miners' Union (OMU), serving a few influential roles, particularly as the Acting President of the OMU during the Coal Miners' Strike of 1873, before being elected as the actual president of the OMU in 1882. McBride, a Democrat, also served in the Ohio State of Representatives for four years, before being appointed commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. During his term, he founded the Ohio People's Party. Additionally, since 1890, McBride has been an editor for the miner's union newspaper, the *Miner's Independent*. As the current President of the AFL, McBride is highly supportive of the labor movement and knows that his words will reach far and change history.



## **Gilford Pinchot**

Born in 1865, Gilford Pinchot is an American forester and has always tried to protect America's beautiful landscapes. Born into a fairly wealthy family, he was connected with Republican leaders from early on in his childhood. With encouragement from his parents, he pursued forestry after graduating in 1889, and traveled to Europe to study the French forestry system. Pinchot was heavily influenced by this, even back in the U.S. He earned his first professional position in 1892, as the manager of forests at George Washington Vanderbilt II's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. Here he met John Muir, who would become his mentor, and later, his rival. He believes that forests and natural resources do need to be protected—but they can still be used to a lesser degree. He, of course, believes the opposite. Hopefully, they can reconcile their differences and advocate for change together someday soon...

## **William Saunders**

After moving to the Union in the 1850s, William Saunders worked as a gardener and landscape designer, using his knowledgeable experience from his horticulturalist background to publish advice articles on plant cultivation. In 1863, he was elected by Union governors to design landscapes in and around cemeteries, bringing a simplistic concept of “green landscaping” never seen before. He designed Abraham Lincoln's cemetery after the President's death in 1865. Saunders was the head of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), significantly contributing to their exponential productivity in the next 2 years. Saunders introduced countless disease-resistant plants to the country, especially new crops, some of which were



found to be superior alternatives to previous crops. In 1867, with six others, Saunders founded the National Grange, an organization promoting the economic, social, and political well-being of agricultural and rural communities. As one of the few agriculturalists in a federal role, Saunders is one of the main advocates for the rights of his fellow farmers.

### **Oliver Hudson Kelley**

Oliver Hudson Kelley, born in Boston in 1826, was the first secretary of the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry and one of its original founders. He first started as a telegrapher, learning farming techniques as a hobby before moving to Minnesota to become a farmer. In 1864, he began travelling across the Eastern and Southern states as a clerk for the United States Bureau of Agriculture, laying the foundation for the Grange and establishing a town in Florida along the way. Currently, Kelley is renowned for his articles that have spread Grange policies and chapters throughout Minnesota.



# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. How far are you willing to go in a strike and how much you would give up in a compromise? What are your non-negotiables?
2. Is there any way to work with lawmakers and politicians to protect your rights? How can you expose political abuses to the public?
3. How can you come together and collaborate with working-class citizens across the country to properly utilize your strengths?
4. How will you gain the rights and freedoms you deserve?
5. What is the proper mode of action against those dastardly Captains of Industry?



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