



Tchog-tas-sáb-bee, Black Dog, Chief of the Osage, 1834 – Painting by George Catlin, Smithsonian American Art Museum

***We are friends. We must assist each other to bear our burdens.***

**— Osage Proverb**

## Giovanni

***History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived,  
but if faced with courage need not be lived again.***

— *Maya Angelou*

We took the metro to the Abbesses stop, Les leading me down rue des Abbesses to his favorite brasserie, La Boisson des Sorcières. It was early for dinner with only a couple of lovers in the rear, a wall of Arte Nouveau beveled mirrors framed in sinuous wood, scents of herbs and garlic lingering in the air, a mosaic tile floor of cobalt blue and forest green, scores of wall sconces mounted on walls of mirrors, their subdued light reflecting in the mirrors on the opposing wall, *un chambre des sorcières*, shimmering points of light multiplied ad infinitum on the walls of glass.

“Have you ever had a Croque-Monsieur?” Les asked.

“What is it?”

“Thick tranches of country style bread baked in a white sauce, layered with ham and gruyere fromage, herbes de Provence sprinkled on top.”

“Sounds intense.”

“It’s a religious experience.”

“How’s it made?”

“It’s not just the ingredients — but a magical synergy combining thick bread, ham, cheese, and béchamel, then baked in an oven.”

“It sounds like the secret is in the béchamel. How do you make the sauce?”

“Francine made a lot of Croque-Monsieurs when she was a kid in Trinidad. She melts 2 tablespoons of unsalted butter in a copper saucepan over medium heat, stirs in two tablespoons of flour until it thickens, then gradually whisks in the milk. She adds nutmeg and bay leaf, salt and pepper, increases the heat to a boil until the sauce thickens while continually whisking. She puts thick slices of country bread in a cast iron skillet, brushes

with melted butter and cooks until golden brown on each side. Transferring the bread to a baking sheet, she brushes béchamel over the bread, adds one half the *gruyère* and ham, then another layer of bread and tops with the remaining ham and gruyere, sprinkles with chives and herbes de Provence and bakes for ten to fifteen minutes. Francine is a master of the Croque-Monsieur. It's become my major addiction.”



A croque monsieur in the oven after broiling – Photography by Michael Brewer, Wikimedia

Nearly deserted, La Buisson des Sorcières was the perfect place to talk. After we had finished off the Croque-Monsieurs and a several glasses of Vouvray, Les took out a couple of cigars from his humidor. We lit up and Les went on with his Oklahoma story.

“With no money and great hope, young folk, white and black were drawn like magnets to iron, to a frontier where opportunity was a dream to be realized with grit and hard work. In an era of frenzied growth, the excitement of building a new commonwealth, putting the land under the plow, discovering oil, building towns and cities, ignited a red-hot desire in the settlers to build their fortunes at the expense of the Indian. The white settlers had no knowledge of Indian tradition. In the exhilaration of getting land and putting it to seed, they saw the Indian as a weed to be pulled from the soil and cast aside. The wealthy Indians who owned tracts of land with oil and coal mines and agricultural leases were savvier than the poor. But the grafters had a field day scamming unsophisticated Indians who were completely uninformed about deeds or the real monetary value of the land.”

“Who were the grafters?”

“The grafters were dealers in Indian land Like the California gold rush hysteria, Oklahoma had land rush hysteria. In 1890 there were around 100,000 whites in Oklahoma. By 1900 there were over 300,000 and by statehood in 1907, there were over a half-million whites, while the Indian population remained about the same, probably less than 100,000.”

“The Indians were outnumbered 5 to 1.”

“To force the Native Americans to assimilate, the Dawes Commission gave the Native Americans an allotment of 160 to 320 or in some cases even thousands of acres. The process of dividing up the land and recording the rolls of the tribes, the allotment and surplus concept so bewildered me that I’m not sure I understood exactly what Debo was telling me.”

“Surplus?” I broke in. “That sounds like trouble right there.”

“Right on, Gio. The scheme behind the government’s push to assimilate the Native American was to portion out the land which would allow the Indian the right to sell the part called the ‘surplus,’ to the White man. The Government’s scheme was that by living on his homestead, the Native American would become surrounded by white farmers. That would guarantee that the Indian’s tribal culture would be radically changed due to living in the midst of the whites, cut off from other Indians. It was a clever plan that would assure assimilation of the American Indian. But most importantly,” Les said with compressed lips and a cynical look, “granting the white man the right to buy the Indian’s land would satisfy the land hunger of the settlers. That was the real deal. The allotment-surplus land framework opened the door, to use Angie Debo’s words, ‘to an orgy of plunder and exploitation unparalleled in American history.’”

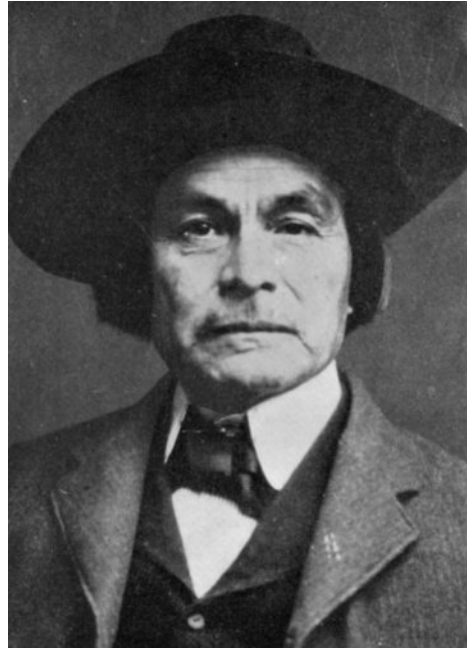
“What could the Indians do?”

“Not much. However, there was one Indian who did something about it?”

“Which tribe?”

“Muscogee Creek — the orator Crazy Snake, Chitto Harjo, who I told you about earlier. He was the prime resister to the Dawes Act allotment process. In the Crazy Snake Rebellion, Chitto and his Snake followers refused to accept their allotments. Chitto formed a separate government with the rebellious Creek to admonish and punish any tribal member who accepted the U.S. division of Indian land. Chitto belonged to the minority of Creek who were loyal to the Union during the American Civil War, while many Creek fought for

for the Confederates. Chitto thought his loyalty to the United States deserved the respect of the government for the tribal treaties. But resistance was like a teepee in a tornado — the land grafters invaded the state.”



Chitto Harjo, Crazy Snake, 1900 – Unknown author, Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, Wikimedia.



Crazy Snake Rebels held in custody, 1909 – United States Army, Oklahoma State Encyclopedia, Wikimedia. Chitto Harjo, a leader and orator of the Muscogee Creek Nation in Indian Territory, was the leader of the Crazy Snake Rebellion, 25 March 1909. Harjo was prime resister to the U.S. Dawes Act allotment process, forming a separate government that punished any Creek who accepted the land division. African Americans who had been driven out of other areas of Oklahoma camped on Harjo’s ground begging for refuge. Seeing the blacks encamped with the Indians and fearing an alliance between the Creek and the African Americans, the neighboring whites got out their guns and organized a posse to run the blacks out of town. In the following violence of the Crazy Snake Rebellion, two white deputies were killed, and many black and white were wounded. The posse put the rebels in jail. Some say Chitto was arrested, others say that aided by the Four Mothers Society, Chitto got away with his followers and hid out in the old Choctaw Nation where he was never again threatened by a white man.

# INDIAN LAND FOR SALE

GET A HOME  
OF  
YOUR OWN  
\*  
EASY PAYMENTS



PERFECT TITLE  
\*  
POSSESSION  
WITHIN  
THIRTY DAYS

## FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED  
IRRIGABLE

GRAZING

AGRICULTURAL  
DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.	Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.
Colorado .....	5,211.21	\$7.27	Oklahoma .....	34,664.00	\$19.14
Idaho .....	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon .....	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas .....	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota .....	120,445.00	16.53
Montana .....	11,034.00	9.86	Washington .....	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska .....	5,641.00	36.65	Wisconsin .....	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota .....	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming .....	865.00	20.64

FOR THE YEAR 1911 IT IS ESTIMATED THAT **350,000** ACRES WILL BE OFFERED FOR SALE

For information as to the character of the land write for booklet, "INDIAN LANDS FOR SALE," to the Superintendent U. S. Indian School at any one of the following places:

- |                                      |  |  |   |  |   |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|---|
| <b>CALIFORNIA:</b><br>Hoopa.         | <b>MINNESOTA:</b><br>Onigum.                       | <b>NORTH DAKOTA:</b><br>Fort Totten.<br>Fort Yates.  | <b>OKLAHOMA—Con.</b><br>Sac and Fox Agency.<br>Shawnee.<br>Wyandotte.   | <b>SOUTH DAKOTA:</b><br>Cheyenne Agency.<br>Crow Creek.<br>Greenwood.<br>Lower Brule.<br>Pine Ridge. | <b>WASHINGTON:</b><br>Fort Simcoe.<br>Fort Spokane.<br>Tekoa.<br>Tulalip. |
| <b>COLORADO:</b><br>Ignacio.         | <b>MONTANA:</b><br>Crow Agency.                    | <b>OKLAHOMA:</b><br>Anadarko.<br>Cantonment.<br>Colony.<br>Darlington.<br>Muskogee, <small>see list</small><br>Pawnee. | <b>OREGON:</b><br>Klamath Agency.<br>Pendleton.<br>Roseburg.<br>Siletz. | Rosebud.<br>Sisseton.  | <b>WISCONSIN:</b><br>Oneida.  |
| <b>IDAHO:</b><br>Lapwai.             | <b>NEBRASKA:</b><br>Macy.<br>Santee.<br>Winnebago. |  |   |  |   |
| <b>KANSAS:</b><br>Horton.<br>Nadeau. |  |  |   |  |   |

**WALTER L. FISHER,**  
Secretary of the Interior.

**ROBERT G. VALENTINE,**  
Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

“And the grafters conned the Indian into selling their land for practically nothing.”

“These cats were smooth confidence men, real estate hustlers operating between Native Americans and real estate speculators, the grease on a slippery slope. Any full-blood or half-blood Indian, due to his literacy in the English language, was automatically considered incompetent by the government. To better protect the naïve Indian, the U.S. decided to appoint guardians for many Indians, especially orphans who’d inherited head rights. The clever machinations of the grafters made ‘protection of the guardians’ a terrible joke. Instead of protecting the Indians, it created a golden opportunity for white lawyers and real estate men to secure federal court orders making them ‘professional guardians’ giving them control of an orphan’s property. The grafter counted his wealth by how many guardianships he owned. He knew the Indians didn’t know how to use all his allotment and had no idea of its true value. Indians signed leases with nothing paid except the initial ten or fifteen dollars — the carrot to induce him to sign the contract. Usually, they didn’t get a cent more.”

“It goes to show,” I said, “how the unintended consequences of a policy made by men with little understanding of Indian culture, allowed the ‘protected’ to be plundered by the guardians. The Indian’s protectors were the Indian’s greatest enemy.”

“The system,” Les said with a bitter snort, “gave the ravens and buzzards the ability to steal the Indians wealth. Many of the guardians and real estate speculators who later became the civic leaders of the state of Oklahoma, held tens of thousands of acres of Indian land. A few even had one hundred thousand acres under lease for which they’d paid practically nothing. The speculators advertised widely for settlers, renting land which they had practically gotten for free, for \$1.50 an acre. The grafters sent scouts into the settlements to befriend the Indians, sell them a bill of goods, round them up, putting hundreds on trains to Muskogee, Vinita, Atoka, and Tishomingo to sign the documents of transfer, paying for the Indian’s train ticket, board and lodging because they had hardly any U.S. currency. At the land offices, the grafter sold them to the highest bidder to the real estate dealer around ten to thirty dollars a head. The Indian was coached by the grafter on what parcels to sell, steering them to lease or sell the best river bottom land. Some real estate dealers seized land without holding title.”

“The Indians were raped.”

“No tribe escaped the rape and pillage. Lumber dealers induced Choctaws to lease forested parcels, paying practically nothing for the timber rights. The dealers harvested all the timber and moved on leaving the

Indian with a tract of despoiled land. Grafters recruited Indians to go out and secure names and signatures in the tribe. Unaware of the damage they were doing to their tribe, they betrayed their tribe for a paltry amount of money. In the fevered years of the race for allotments and ‘surplus land,’ one million and one-half acres were transferred to the white man in Oklahoma. Debo said, the speculators were driven by their belief in the American Manifest Destiny, married to personal greed.”

“What happened when oil was discovered?”

“The Indians called the oil seeping from the ground, ‘medicine springs.’ Oil was used to remove ticks from horses and cattle. The first oil well in Oklahoma was a complete accident around the same time of the first oil strike in Pennsylvania right before the Civil War. The brother of Chief John Ross of the Cherokees



**Natural petroleum seeps were used by Native Americans to remove ticks from horses and cattle – Photograph by Lldenke, Wikimedia**

“The first intentional oil strike was in Washington County in 1897 and then in Red Fork of the Creek Nation in 1901. During the next five years all hell broke loose with discovery after discovery in fields beginning on the Kansas border down through the Cherokee Nation sixty-five miles south of Tulsa to the Creek Nation. The Glenn Pool strike in 1905 in Creek Country south of Tulsa became the most spectacular producing field in the world which led to the creation of Sinclair Oil. Wildcatters and Rockefeller’s Standard Oil drilled thousands of wells which by 1904 controlled 90% of American oil production, exporting kerosene to 400 million Chinese and building the first oil tankers. By the time Oklahoma had become a state in 1907, it was the nation’s largest oil producer.





Oil well gusher, Okemah, Oklahoma, 21 February, 1922 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia



Early 1900s, the era of the oil gushers – Unknown author, public domain. Wikimedia

“More money was made off the Oklahoma oil boom than the Colorado silver rush and California gold rush combined. By the time it became a state, Oklahoma produced one half of American oil and more oil than any nation in the world. The Creek Indian trading post and little Frisco railroad stop had become the ‘Oil Capital of the World.’ From the time of the 1912 Cushing Pool strike in Creek County, the 1913 giant Healdton Field in Ardmore, 1921 Osage county, and 1923 field in Seminole County, Oklahoma was awash in oil.

“If the Osage weren’t originally from Oklahoma, where did the tribe come from?”

“In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Osage were living in the Ohio valley region including Kentucky, but the continual attacks by the Iroquois drove them westward into Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, the Osage becoming the dominant power between the Missouri River in the North and the Red River in the south. Along with the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache they dominated western Oklahoma, combining the characteristics of eastern Indians, raising corn and squash and gathering nuts and berries, with the traits of the nomadic western Indians, hunting elk and bear in the timber lands and hunting buffalos on the Great Plains.



*Osage warrior of the Wha-sha-she band, 1834 – Painting by George Catlin, public domain, Wikimedia*

“The marvelous painter George Catlin who best recorded the American Indians at the height of their civilization, portrayed the Osage as the tallest race in America. Explorers said that the Osage were the most handsome Indians in the West.”

“The ballerina, Maria Tallchief,” I said, “inherited the beauty of the Osage.”

“George Catlin’s elegant paintings capture their beauty,” Les said, “When the French discovered their village near the Osage River in western Missouri, the Osage had adopted the horse from other tribes who’d gotten them from early Spanish conquistador Francisco Coronado during his quest in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century for the gold of Quivira in New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas.”



*War on the plains, 1834, Comanche warrior, at right, pursuing Osage warrior. Painting by George Catlin, public domain, Wikimedia*

“The Spanish discovered the Osage before the French?”

“As far as I know, the Spanish never made contact with the Osage. Nearly a century before the French explorers arrived, Francisco Coronado came up from Mexico through the southwest, riding for days through herds of buffalo. Historians believe that the tribes Coronado encountered were Apache, Zuni, Caddo, Wichita, and Pawnee, not the Osage who were further north at that time. After failing to find Quivira, legendary City of Gold, Coronado returned bankrupt to Mexico, his only cultural influence being the introduction of the horse to the Great Plains. About the same time as Coronado was scouting the Southwest, Hernando de Soto was coming up the West coast of Florida from Tampa Bay across Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, then crossing the Mississippi on rafts to Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma, attempting to awe the Indians by presenting himself as the ‘Sun God.’ Like Coronado, de Soto failed to find gold and died somewhere along the Mississippi, accomplishing little except the introduction of horses and the pigs, which are the ancestors of the Razorback pigs of the Ozark mountains. Besides slaughtering a lot of Indians, the primary impact of de Soto’s trek was the spreading of European diseases, measles, chicken pox, and smallpox. With no immunity to European diseases, the native Americans Indians died by the thousands.”



***Discovery of the Mississippi* by William H. Powell, a highly romanticized portrayal of Hernando de Soto seeing the Mississippi River for the first time. William H. Powell was commissioned by the Congress for a painting in the Rotunda of the United State Capitol – Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol, public domain, Wikimedia**

“The coming of the Spaniards,” I said, “was a disaster for the Indians.”

“It was not the Spanish, but the French who had the biggest impact on the Osage. Other than the explorers, I give the Jesuit priests a lot of credit for influencing Osage culture. I’ve been reading about the Osage since I was knee high to a grasshopper. It’s fascinating how the French succeeded in going native with the Indians, marrying into the tribes and speaking their language. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Jesuit missionaries Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet, took an expedition from Canada down the Mississippi River. A man dedicated to spreading the word of God, Father Marquette learned to speak fluently in six different Native American dialects, discovered the Kaw, Pawnee, and Osage tribes and claimed for France, all the land of the Mississippi Valley. From the time of the first contact with Marquette’s band of explorers, Osage trade with the whites flourished through the skilled diplomacy of a French explorer, Etienne de Veniard, Sieur de Bourgmont who’d fled France to escape imprisonment for poaching on the land of a monastery. One of the *coureurs de bois*, Bourgmont founded Fort Orleans, the first fort in Osage territory on the Missouri River.



French explorer, Etienne de Veniard, Sieur de Bourgmont's wife from the Otoe-Missouria tribe on her return from France to Fort Orleans, 1725 – Painting by Ernest L. Blumenschein, Missouri State Capitol mural, public domain, Wikimedia. Bourgmont and his Missouria wife accompanied a delegation of leaders from the Illinois, Missouria, Osage, and Otoe tribes to France where they were entertained at Fontainebleau and hunted in the royal forest with King Louis XV.

“After a series of attacks by the powerful Iroquois, explorer Samuel de Champlain began recruiting young men to live with the natives, learning their customs and language, a program which Champlain carried out to increase the French fur trade on rivers west of the Mississippi. Many of the French *coureurs de bois*, failed to pay for licenses from the New France authorities, becoming outlaws pushing deeper into the wilderness, learning the survival skills of the Indians, mastering the art of the canoe, and taking Indian wives.

“Not only were the *coureurs de bois* important in establishing intimate relations with the Osage, the Jesuit priests stationed in the French forts, sent missionaries to the Osage, learned their language and converted them to Catholicism, making the Osage allies of the French in their struggle with the Spanish for control of the Mississippi region. To entertain the French King Louis XV, Sieur de Bourgmont took a delegation of Osage chiefs to Paris where the king took them hunting in the forest of Fontainebleau where he admired their marksmanship and to an opera at the Palace of Versailles where the powerful voices of the opera singers in splendid costumes amused the Osage chieftains. Attuned to fashion, the French were knocked out by the beaded, feathered, and furred costumes of the Osage.”

“Céline told me about Louis XV entertaining Native Americans at Versailles.”

“Indians were the ultimate exotic for the French court.” Les said with a broad smile. “France’s love affair with the American Indian continues to this day. It’s a pity that the French haven’t romanticized the Algerians as they have the Indians. In losing the French and Indian War, France was forced to give up all the land east of the Mississippi to the English. Even after the French administrators were gone, the Osage continued trading with the French Creole fur trader Auguste Chouteau’s trading post in St. Louis. August, born in New Orleans, recruited men at Fort Chartres, taking his crew up the Mississippi where he established a fort on the site of the future city of St. Louis. The dynasty of the Chouteau family dominated the city of St. Louis and the fur trade in the Missouri valley for many years, a dynasty made possible by Auguste’s diplomatic skills with Indians and whites. In exchange for building a fort, he extracted from the new administrators, a Chouteau trade monopoly on the Missouri and Osage River, constructing a warehouse at a site which became Kansas City. After Jefferson’s purchase of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, a half-brother of Auguste Chouteau, a wealthy fur trader, Jean-Pierre Chouteau based in Salina, Oklahoma, was appointed U.S. Indian agent for the Osage.”



The home of Auguste Chouteau in St. Louis, where Lewis and Clark stayed and purchased supplies for their 1803 expedition  
– Sketch by Lyman P. Powell, public domain, Wikimedia

“I’ve heard a lot of talk of Osage millionaires. How could they end up possessing some of the richest oil deposits in U.S. history?”

“Relative to the disaster of most of the American tribes, serendipity intervened on behalf of the Osage.”

“Serendipity?”

“A succession of unexpected and fortunate coincidences. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the government forced the Osage to give up their territory in Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma in exchange for a reservation

in Kansas with a promise of federal aid intended to help the Osage become farmers. The Protestant missionaries came to convert the Osage but didn't have much success due to their inflexible dogma. When the Great Plains smallpox pandemic hit the plains from Canada to the Southwest during 1836 – 1840, the Protestant clergy fled while the Catholic priests stayed with the Osage, many of the priests dying in the epidemic. More than 17,000 American Indians along the Missouri River died from the pandemic with some tribes like the Mandan, becoming nearly extinct. That loyalty created a special bond between the tribe and the Catholic Church. During the Reconstruction period after the Civil War, settlers were lobbying Washington hard, demanding the right to settle on the Osage reservation, so the Osage were forced to cede four million acres to the U.S. In 1870, Congress passed the Drum Creek Treaty which mandated that the Osage sell their Kansas reservation and purchase land in the Cherokee Outlet in Indian Territory.”

“So that’s how the Osage lucked out.”

“Little did the government dream,” Les laughed, “that there were millions of barrels of oil under the new Osage reservation in Indian Territory. The U.S. originally offered 19 cents an acre for their land in Kansas, but the Osage resisted the sale until the Ulysses S. Grant administration gave them \$1.25 per acre which allowed them to buy a good chunk of Oklahoma land. By purchasing the land out right, the Osage gained one and one-half million acres between Tulsa and Ponca City including the mineral rights in what became Osage County after statehood was proclaimed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1907. The three major Osage bands founded Pawhuska, Hominy, and Fairfax, and the Catholic missions and nuns established their schools.”

“Why did the Osage relate so well with the Catholic religion?”

“You’re forgetting that during the smallpox pandemic, the Catholic priests stood by the Osage while the Protestants did not. Over and beyond loyalty, the mystical side of Catholicism appealed to the natural mysticism of the Indian’s ancient native religion. But it was a long time before the Osage prospered in Oklahoma. During the depression of 1870, the U.S. failed to give the Osage their promised annuities. Attacked by outlaws and squatters and possessing poor soil for farming, the tribe struggled to survive. Fortunately, the Osage discovered that the bluestem grass was the best grazing land in Oklahoma and began to prosper by leasing tracts of land to ranchers. Acting under the Dawes Act, the U.S. divided the reservation into individual allotments, the Osage’s shrewd Chief Big Heart succeeding in negotiating the ownership of all mineral rights whereby each Osage landowner received a ‘headright’ which guaranteed each one an equal share of all mineral income. When the oil



barons, Phillips, Marland, and Sinclair began leasing Osage land, drilling thousands of oil wells and pumping millions of barrels of oil from massive oil fields, a lot of Indians got rich quick. But the wealth brought a curse on the Osage.”

“Money is a curse?”

“When it attracts people who want to kill you.”

“If a white killed an Osage, how would that give him rights to his land?”

“A Texas rancher and power broker in Fairfax, William K. Hale, devised a complex scheme for accumulating the head rights of the Osage, by having his relative marry an Osage woman with headrights, then killing her relatives so she would inherit their head right. Hale had his nephew, Ernest Burkhart, marry Mollie Kyle a full-blood with an Osage allotment, setting off a chain of murders. Hale had Burkhart poison Mollie’s mother, Lizzie, which gave Mollie an inheritance of three headrights in addition to her own, since her mother had inherited the head rights of her deceased husband and her daughter, Anna Brown who’d been shot to death a short time before. Her other daughter was killed when her house was destroyed by a violent explosion. After the death of Lizzie’s nephew and 24 others had been killed, not only Osage, but whites who knew too much, local authorities had conducted zero investigations. The coroner’s of ice listed poisoning as a suicide. The Osage Allotment Act didn’t allow the tribe the right to call for autopsies, a perfect formula to conceal a perfect crime. The tribe called it the Osage Reign of Terror. No one knew who would die next.”



**William K. Hale, murderer of over twenty-four Osage to Gain head-rights, 1922 – Unknown author, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Wikimedia**

“It sounds like a film noir instead of a John Wayne movie.”

“The corruption in Osage County in the 20s and 30s,” Les said, “was a film noir — an oil-soaked era of opulence, greed, and corruption. Bank robber, Pretty Boy Floyd who Oklahomans called the ‘Robin Hood of Cookson Hills’ because he destroyed bank mortgages during his hold ups, flourished in an era celebrated for crime. When tribal leaders set up a system of per-capita distribution of mineral royalties, they were acting to keep tribal resources in the hands of tribal members. But it didn’t protect the Osage. The astonishing wealth accumulated by vast oil profits led to massive exploitation. Government agents took kickbacks and oil companies underreported output. Common criminals poured into the reservation and lawyers appeared out of the woodwork offering to represent Osage for exorbitant fees. Pawhuska, the Osage County seat, had a population of 8,000 and 80 lawyers, a higher ratio of lawyers to citizens than Washington D. C. The stores left their merchandise unmarked, giving one price to the whites, and an inflated ‘Osage Price’ to the Indians.”

“Didn’t anyone from outside Osage County intervene?”

“It wasn’t easy, because like the Mafiosi, Hale had intimidated the town by his power. The Osage Tribal Council suspected Hale, but he had bribed or intimidated everyone into remaining silent. Finally, a local law man, Henry Pyle, helped the Tribal Council to approach the U.S. Bureau of Investigation to intervene. It was the first big case of Herbert Hoover’s fledgling crime bureau which sent in undercover officers disguised as farmers, ranchers, and oil men to uncover the truth. After a lot of work, Hale’s nephew, Burkhart confessed and turned state’s evidence. Despite his deep support in the community, Hale was hard to convict. After three contentious trials, Hale was convicted in 1929 and sentenced to imprisonment in the Leavenworth federal penitentiary in Kansas. Hale, who had ordered the killing of twenty-four, the greatest mass murderer in Oklahoma history, was paroled after only eighteen years. That’s American justice for the Indian.

“The tragedy of the situation was that although all members can equally partake of the benefits of tribal membership, only a few share in the tribe's mineral wealth. Today, the vast quantities of natural gas and oil extracted annually from beneath the tribe's former reservation are of little benefit to most tribal members. Instead, the system has created the haves and have-nots among the Osage. By fate, the 2% Indians who had oil discovered on the land, got very rich and the other 98% were left desperately poor. After striking oil in Muskogee County, Oklahoma in 1916 and by the 1950’s becoming the world’s richest private citizen, billionaire Jean Paul Getty said, ‘The meek shall inherit the earth, but not the mineral rights.’

“Finally, the Federal government passed a law in 1925 which prohibited non-Osages from inheriting the headrights of tribal members possessing more than one-half Osage blood. It was the same miserable story for all the tribes in every corner of the United States,” Les said with a flourish of slender fingers, pale tips flashing in the dark. “It was impossible for the Indian to resist Washington by force. They were outnumbered 10,000 to one. In the settlement of Oklahoma, the U.S. government listened to the white settlers and for the most part, was deaf to the Indians.

“You learned all these facts from Debo’s book?”

“Piece by piece,” Les replied, raw anger in his voice, “Debo has uncovered things that a lot of folks don’t want to know. In *A History of the Indians of the United States* and *Still the Waters Run*, Angie Debo documented how the Native American lost his land. Originally intended to be published by the University of Oklahoma Press, the university backed down and refused to publish *And Still the Waters Run*.”

“Debo had exposed leaders of Oklahoma who didn’t welcome the exposure.”

“Right on,” Les said, thumping the marble tabletop. “It was too controversial in Oklahoma. She fingered prominent citizens and government officials who collaborated in the plundering of the Indians. That scared hell out of administrators of the University. They feared to print an exposé of officials and grafters who’d looted the wealth of the Indians. Although she’d finished the book in 1936, it took four years before Princeton University Press published her book in 1940, 30 years after the Indian’s land had been plundered.”

“God bless Angie Debo,” I said, “she was fighting for the honor of disrespected people. She was a heroine — a woman who looked the facts in the eye and got them published.”

“The establishment put Angie down time after time. That’s what happens to champions of a truth that people don’t want to hear. But nothing stopped her. She kept telling the Native American’s side of history. When she entered University of Chicago for graduate study, she’d hoped to get a master’s degree in history, but the university wouldn’t allow a woman to graduate in history. Instead, she got a degree in international relations, writing one of the first thesis on American isolationism. Even after getting a masters from a topflight school, Angie couldn’t land a job. No history department would hire a woman historian. She didn’t get her PhD from Oklahoma University until she was forty-three.”

“Yvonne ran into the same discrimination against female intellectuals. It’s as bad in France as in



A sod house on the American prairie, 1901 – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia

America. Despite being rejected by the male establishment, Debo kept on revealing the truth.”

“Angie had guts and perseverance. Judging that she was born in 1890 in Kansas, I expect she grew up in one of those sod houses on the prairie.”

“I’ve seen photographs of those prairie cabins, part underground, walls made up of squares of grass rooted soil, stacked like bricks. Must have been damp in the rainy season with a lot of worms and bugs.”

“It wasn’t pleasant living,” Les said. “People without land or money trying to settle a wild place were determined people. Not having the right tools, fighting the cold and the heat without enough kerosene or coal, digging a well and coming up dry, it was as hard a life as the sharecroppers in Mississippi. When Angie was 9 years old, her family moved from Kansas to Oklahoma in a covered wagon. I think it was about 1899, only ten years after the Oklahoma Land Rush. Since you had to ride half a day to find a teacher in Oklahoma, Angie began teaching at age 16 even though she didn’t get her high school diploma until she was 23.”

“How could she teach without a diploma?”

Les slapped his hands and laughed. “Because her town didn’t have a high school. Few had a high school diploma in back woods places. Angie had a fascination for the American Indian. She was stricken with what the Indian had suffered. Her dissertation for her doctorate at the University of Oklahoma, was on the impact of the American Civil War on the Choctaws. Before she wrote *And Still the Waters Run, the Betrayal*

of the *Five Civilized Tribes*, she published during the '30s depression, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*. Debo was an innovator in the writing of American history. Instead of looking at events from the white point of view, she viewed history from inside the tribe — tried to understand the Indian's way of thinking. Back in New York, I bought a copy of Debo's, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital.*, but I was so busy arranging our tunes for Paris, I never found time to read it. It's on my list when I get back to the city. . . that is, if I ever go back. If you care for the Indians the way I do, Gio, you must read her book *And Still the Waters Run*. After it came out, people got so outraged that Angie was barred from teaching school in Oklahoma. She had to work as a librarian at Oklahoma State University, take consulting jobs to make ends meet while writing book after book on Indians.

“Over a long period of time, people began to listen to what Debo and other Indian advocates were insisting on. Thirty-five years after the Act was passed, Indian activists lobbied President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration to reverse the Dawes Act piece of crap by giving the Indians a ‘New Deal.’”



Franklin Delano Roosevelt in a wheelchair with his Scottish Terrier, [Fala](#), and Ruthie Bie, the daughter of caretakers at his Hyde Park estate, 1941 – Photograph by Margaret Suckley, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, public domain, Wikimedia

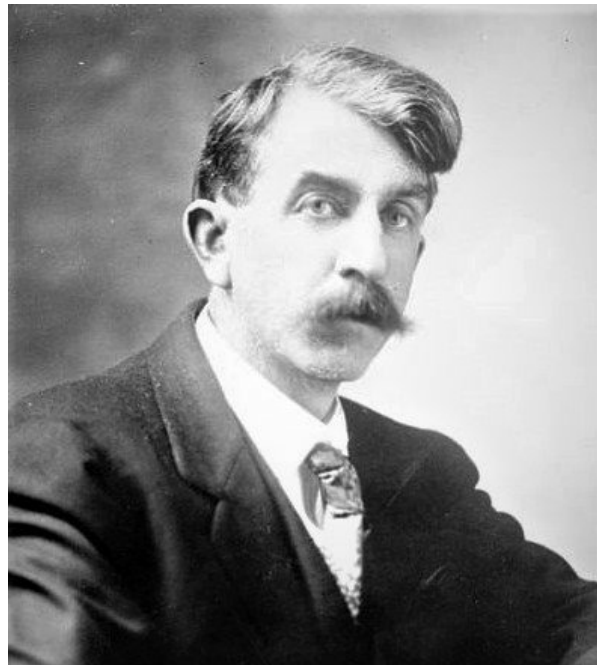
“What was the New Deal?”

“The Indian New Deal is a nickname for the Indian Reorganization Act. Passed by the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, it reversed the privatization of Indian holdings.”

“FDR gave the Indians back their right to govern their tribe?”

“Right on,” Les said, striking his knuckle against the table, “one of the few good things to happen during the Great Depression. The Indians finally got to make their own decisions about their land. The Tribes began forming their own governments which meant a great number of tribal governments in Oklahoma. Under the Indian Reorganization Act, over two million acres were returned to the Indians.

“Oklahoma,” Les said his lips compressed, “has some beautiful places and beautiful people, but years later, Oklahoma is still a southern state where a black man has to walk carefully around the police. Don’t step out of line or run or you’ll get shot. Even though I have a love of Greenwood and have memories of the good times there, it hurts to go there. I’m bitter, Gio, whites in Oklahoma haven’t treated either the blacks or the Indians right.



William H. Murray, “Alfalfa Bill,” Governor of Oklahoma, 1931-1935 – Photograph by Bain News Service, public domain, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia. Murray turned against Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal Program, preferring a system of fascism instead. In 1948 Alfalfa Bill supported Strom Thurmond’s Dixiecrat third party bid for the presidency as the States’ Rights Democratic Party candidate, receiving 2.4% of the popular vote and 39 electoral college votes. As Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and governor, Murray sponsored Jim Crow laws like other southern states to control blacks. Murray said, “*We should adopt a provision prohibiting the mixed marriages of negroes with other races in this State, and provide for separate schools and give the Legislature power to separate them in waiting rooms and on passenger coaches, and all other institutions in the State . . . As a rule they are failures as lawyers, doctors and in other professions . . . I appreciate the old-time ex-slave, the old darky – and they are the salt of their race – who comes to me talking softly in that humble spirit which should characterize their actions and dealings with the white man.*” Quoted from Timothy Egan’s, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 2006

“You were talking about two Oklahomas,” I said. “How did Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory become one state?”

“There was one last attempt for the Native Americans to maintain control over their land. Realizing how the corrupt Dawes Commission was defrauding the Indians of their lands, the chiefs of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee Creek, Cherokees, and Seminoles got together in Muscogee. With the aid of Robert Latham Owen, an Oklahoma lawyer with Cherokee blood on his mother’s side, the tribes organized the Sequoia Constitutional Convention, elected Pleasant Porter, Chief of the Creeks as president, drafted a state constitution and elected delegates to petition the United States Congress for statehood. The Indian state would be called the State of Sequoia in honor of Sequoia who 80 years before had created the writing system for the Cherokee language. In the territory referendum in 1905, a great majority of the voters endorsed the State of Sequoia, the first state with a majority of Native Americans.”

“Let me guess. Congress flat out refused the Indian’s petition.”

“Right on. Despite receiving overwhelming support in a 1905 Indian Territory referendum, Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt rejected the proposal of the Five Civilized Tribes. A lot of white people hated the idea of a state where the Indians would be in control, especially a state where oil had been discovered. The whites wanted the land for themselves. Indians weren’t civilized enough to run a state.”

Les took out his polishing cloth from his vest pocket. Seeing him deep in thought I didn’t say a word and waited patiently wondering what he was going to come up with next. After polishing his glasses several times, Les looked at me, that direct look that sets me tingling, then said with a drawl, “Well, it might seem to be a digression from how Oklahoma became a state, but since I’ve mentioned Robert Latham Owen, I like to talk a little about the American banking system and how it affected farmers on the prairie.”

“Go ahead. I’m all ears.”

“Robert Owen’s history is so bound up with the history of Oklahoma that I’ve spent a lot of time studying Owen’s ideas, especially his co-sponsorship of the Owen-Glass bill in the U.S. Congress which created the Federal Reserve System in 1913.”

“Will they ask on the citizenship test,” I asked, “about the Federal Reserve System? If so, you’d better tell me, because I’ve never heard of it.”

Les let out a big laugh and slapped his thigh. “I don’t think they’ll ask that question, but everybody should know about the economic system of their country. How can you vote intelligently if you don’t? You gotta know the facts or you’re for sure going to vote for the wrong party. Mr. Owen, a white man with Cherokee blood on his mama’s side, proves that a businessman, a lawyer, and a politician can actually do something that improves the life of the working man, even though he also gets rich in the process. Born to a wealthy family in a big house on a hill overlooking the James River in Lynchburg, Virginia, Owen went to an elite school in Baltimore where he studied the classics, languages, and mathematics. His papa’s wealth, based on railroad investments, was wiped out in the Panic of 1873 and it killed his papa in the process. At the age of seventeen, Owens was fatherless and dead broke, his mama making ends meet by taking in music students. But Owen had an iron will and made it through Washington and Lee University on a President’s scholarship, graduating as valedictorian with a master’s degree and was awarded the gold medal for his debating skills.



**Robert Latham Owen, 1907. The year Oklahoma became a state, Owen, a Democrat, was elected to the Senate – Unknown author, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia**

“His Cherokee grandfather, having moved west before the Trail of Tears, encouraged Owen’s mother who’d grown up in Cherokee culture, to move with her son to Salina in Indian Territory where being on the Dawes Rolls, she was entitled to property. While his mama taught music at the Cherokee Seminary, Owen

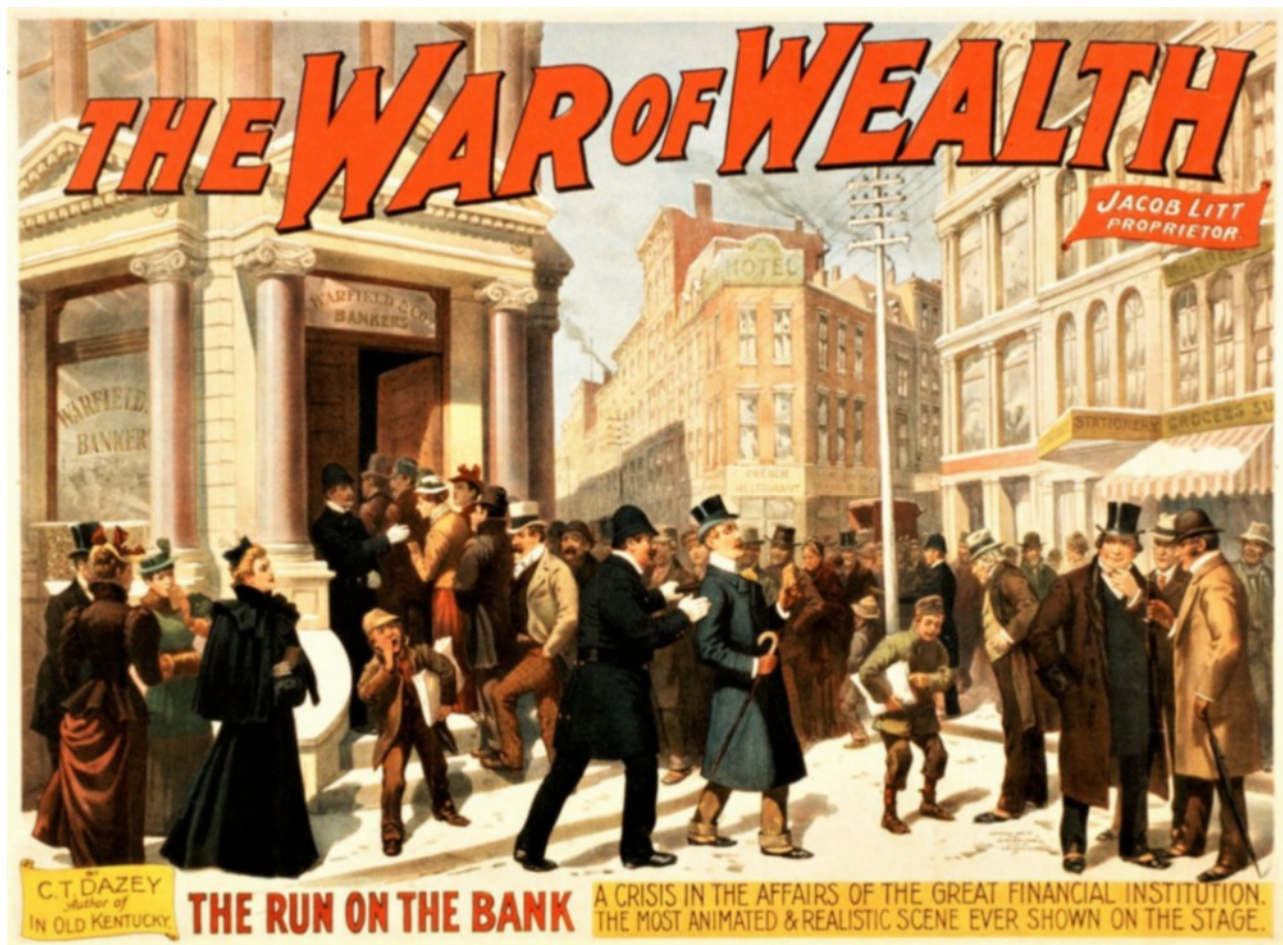


began teaching at the asylum for Cherokee orphans and soon began reorganizing the Cherokee school system. After being admitted to the bar, he set up as a lawyer, invested in a newspaper in Vinita and with his powers of persuasion and boundless energy, talked his way into being appointed the Indian Agent for the Five Civilized Tribes, about the most important job in all of Indian Territory. As a lawyer, Owen's career took off when he represented the Eastern Cherokees against the U.S. Government, successfully collecting several million dollars due to the tribe by the treaty of 1835, then going on to represent the Western Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. With the proceeds from his many successful cases and speculation in oil leases, he established the First National Bank of Muskogee that barely survived the Crash of 1893."

"The Crash of 1893?"

"Actually, it's called the Panic of 1893, the worst depression that the United States had ever experienced up to that time."

"What caused it?"



Poster for the *War of Wealth* by Charles Turner Dazey. Inspired by the Panic of 1893, the melodrama opened on Broadway, 10 February 1895 – Author, Strobridge Lith. Co, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“A railroad bubble and there was no central bank to maintain liquidity in the nation’s private banks. During the Gilded Age, the U.S. was experiencing the greatest surge of economic expansion in its history driven primarily by speculation in railroads with everyone wanting a piece of the action leading to the over-building of railroads, incurring debts which outstripped revenues, causing the Union Pacific Railroad and Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroads to fail in turn creating a domino effect with tens of thousands of companies going belly up. One hundred and twenty-five railroads failed. The bottom fell out of the stock market and solvent firms began hoarding cash precipitating a crisis. Panicked by the fear of losing their life savings, people made runs on the banks withdrawing their funds causing hundreds of banks to fail and creating an unemployment rate of over 20 percent in some areas. Exports were hurt because Europe was also suffering a depression and British investors sold their American stock increasing the panic on Wall Street. President Cleveland did little to deal with the crash. At that time, both political parties believed that the business cycle was a natural phenomenon which should be allowed to correct itself without government interference. Due to the vast number of failed banks and no deposit insurance, many of the middle class lost their life savings and their jobs which meant they couldn’t pay their mortgages. Money appreciated in value and property fell in value to one half its previous value allowing creditors to take over the property of thousands of debtors, millions of people leading lives of misery. The flow of gold out of the country was so great that President Cleveland had to borrow gold from Wall Street banker J.P. Morgan and the Rothschild banking family in England.”

“Did Owen’s bank in Muskogee go under?”

“Owen’s sound management saw it through the crisis. But when Owen saw city folk facing starvation, people doing odd jobs for food, people losing their homes, farmers losing their farms, women falling into prostitution to feed their kids, it reminded him of when he was seventeen and his papa lost his entire wealth in the Panic of 1873. After over 500 banks failed or were suspended in the Panic of 1893, Owen began thinking about what a mess the American banking system was — there was no safety net, no provision for adequate liquidity. He was saying, ‘While bean counters are important to an economy. Don’t put them in charge of making moral decisions.’”

“Did Senator Owen actually say that?”

“No, I just made it up,” Les laughed. “I’ll bet that’s what he was thinking. Seriously though, it was about having access to cash when you needed it. The small banks didn’t have the same access as the big banks

on the East Coast. The agricultural states were far from the liquid assets of Philadelphia and New York City. From the perspective of a small-town banker in agricultural Oklahoma, Owen distrusted Wall Street in making the best monetary decisions for the nation. Being a curious man. . .” Les broke off and tapped my hand. “You know what a curious man is? He’s one who invents. Whether inventing a better corn harvester or a new banking system or a tune, it all starts with curiosity. You gotta keep that curiosity. It will lead you to solutions. Owen’s curiosity sent him to Europe. He was going to find out how a central bank worked. The United States hadn’t had a central bank since Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury who set up the first central bank to stabilize and improve a young nation’s credit.



Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, and Philip Schuyler strolling on Wall Street, New York, 1790 – Painting by Jennie Augusta Brownscombe, 1913, public domain, Wikimedia



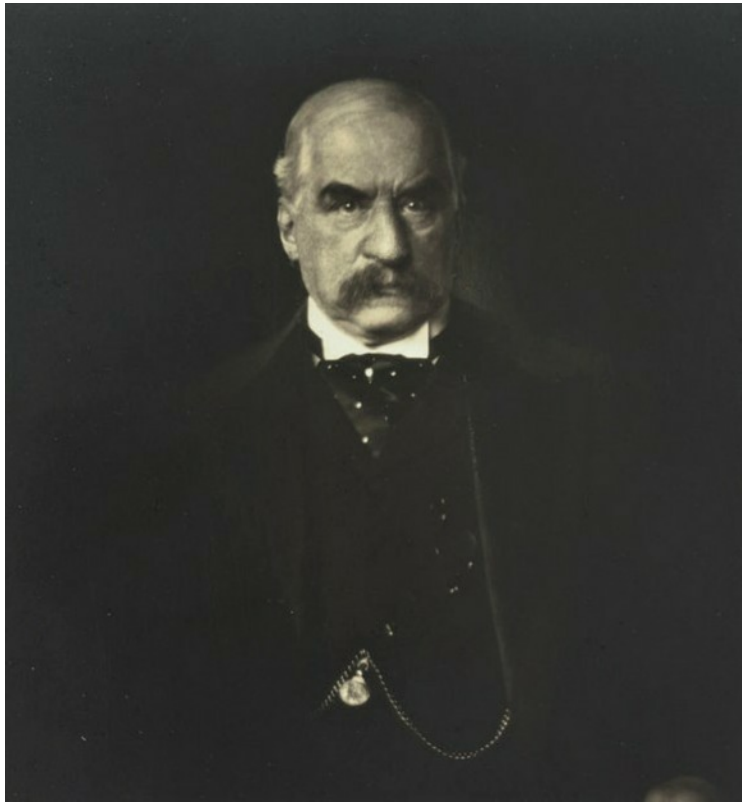
Aaron Burr – Alexander Hamilton duel on the Hudson River, Weehawken, New Jersey, 11 July 1804 – Unknown illustrator from a painting by J. Mund, public domain, Wikimedia

“Hamilton’s central bank only lasted twenty years. The U.S. had been without one ever since Hamilton’s First Bank had been abandoned and the Second Bank terminated in 1836 by Andrew Jackson who was an opponent of centralized banking. Knowing that something had to change to deal with the financial panics which leveled capitalist America every twenty years, Owen visited the central banks of England, France, and Germany. While each had a different structure, all of them could do what the United States could not.

“What is the function of a central bank?”

“Expand the currency quickly when waves of financial fear strike. Robert Latham Owen’s chance to make changes came in 1907 when Teddy Roosevelt signed the proclamation establishing the State of Oklahoma, the 46<sup>th</sup> state in the union and he was elected senator as a Democrat for the new state of Oklahoma. In his first few years in the Senate, he proposed a number of financial reforms, restrictions on speculation, a more elastic currency, and a federal deposit insurance, but as a freshman Democratic senator in a Republican-controlled Senate, none of his proposals were adopted. Six years later when Woodrow Wilson was elected and the Democrats took control of the Senate, Owen succeeded in creating a Senate Committee on Banking and Currency with himself as its first chairman. The New York bankers agreed with Owen that there was a need for increased liquidity during financial crises but objected strongly to his idea of having the government in charge of currency and the banking system. That was the battle — who would be in charge of banking and money — private banks or the government?

“In the Panics of 1893 and 1907, Owen had seen how the banks directly tied to New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, were able to access cash, while many small-town banks in Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska went under because they couldn’t cover their withdrawals. When the failure of the Knickerbocker Trust Company in New York precipitated the Banking Panic of 1907 there had been a pre-existing instability in the money supply because of the huge amounts of cash needed for rebuilding San Francisco which had been devastated by the earthquake the year before. Since there was no central bank to provide funding for the failing banks, it was only through banker J. Pierpont Morgan’s tactics of locking up the Wall Street bankers in his library and not letting them leave until they agreed to provide the millions of dollars to back the teetering banks and underfunded trusts that the 1907 Panic began to stabilize. While he was strong arming the bankers to put up their cash, J. P. Morgan was prevailing upon the ministers of the city to preach sermons advocating confidence in the banking system, though the clergy’s preaching didn’t have the best effect as depositors were standing in line for hours to withdraw their cash, hiring place holders at \$10 a day to hold their place in line.”



**J. Pierpont Morgan, 1903 – Photograph by Edward Steichen, public domain, Wikimedia**



**The Knickerbocker Trust Company that failed in the 1907 Panic – Author, McKim, Mead, and White, public domain, Wikimedia. The failure of the Knickerbocker Trust Company triggered the Banking Panic of 1907.**



Puck Magazine cartoon of J. P. Morgan seizing control of the banks, entitled "The Central Bank – Why should Uncle Sam establish one, when Uncle Pierpont is already on the job?" – Illustration by Frank Arthur Nankivell, 2 February 1910, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“Papa told me to never keep my money in a bank.”

“Well, in Paris,” Les laughed, “you’d better not keep it under the mattress. However, in the days before federal deposit insurance, it was risky to deposit it in a bank. After the Banker’s Panic of 1907, there was a call for major changes in the financial system. Senator Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island introduced a bill to establish a U.S. central bank, saying, ‘Something has got to be done. We may not always have Pierpont Morgan with us to meet a banking crisis.’ But Robert Owen objected to Senator Aldrich’s solution for it would leave the monetary system concentrated in the hands of a clique of New York Bankers who would have the power to coerce every bank and large business in America. Owen said that rather than allow the banking powers of the U.S. to be concentrated in private hands, it was necessary to place control of the system in the government of the United States.

“It took another six years after the Banking Panic of 1907, but Oklahoma Senator, Robert Owen, working with Carter Glass in the House of Representatives and the Woodrow Wilson administration, introduced the Owen-Glass bill, known as the Federal Reserve Act, which was passed by Congress in 1913 establishing the first United States central bank in 75 years, setting up twelve regional Reserve Banks as independent corporations under the oversight of a government appointed board in Washington. Currency became the responsibility of the government rather than private banks, which was an invaluable tool in the financing of World War One. But the Fed didn’t work out as well as Owen had hoped. It’s hard to change the ways of the big banks on Wall Street for Congress preferred to listen to the banks and not to the workers and farmers.

“Despite Wilson’s progressive ideas, the passing of the Clayton Antitrust Act that strengthened labor unions, allowing strikes, boycotts, and peaceful picketing, and despite that the president was finally goaded into supporting the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment giving women the right to vote, I can’t forget that he was a Southerner who blamed Radical Republicans and Northern carpetbaggers for ruining the South during Reconstruction. When Wilson was president of Princeton University, no African Americans were admitted, even though Harvard and Yale had been doing it for some time. He segregated black soldiers, wouldn’t let them fight, and allowed government offices to re-segregate restrooms and lunchrooms in the Capitol. But the cruelest thing he did which broke the hearts of black people, was his systematic purge of blacks in the government. While Jim Crow reigned in the South, up until that time in D.C., thousands of blacks had passed the federal Civil Service exams to achieve management positions in the government. Under Woodrow Wilson, all the advances made under Theodore Roosevelt were reversed. Within a short time, African Americans were removed from management positions, either fired or demoted to menial work. Woodrow Wilson was not a friend of black folk.”

Les took off his glasses and polished them with his handkerchief. When Les is angry, it’s best to not say a word, just listen. After a while he went on again. “When Woodrow Wilson ran for a second term in 1916, Senator Owen pushed Wilson to expand upon the Progressive Party’s platform of 1912 — focus on legislation to promote worker’s health and safety, prohibit child labor, set minimum wages and maximum hours, especially in the railroad industry and set up unemployment compensation — progressive ideas that were later to come to full fruition during FDR’s New Deal. When you look at Wilson’s speeches, you realize that he was a strict moralist and preacher.”

“Wouldn’t you say that Lincoln and FDR were moralists too?”

“That’s true, but Lincoln and Roosevelt had a suppleness, a flexibility that Woodrow Wilson didn’t have. When Wilson believed he held the moral high ground, he was closed to any kind of moderation. And that was his Achilles heel. Although Wilson was awarded the 1919 Nobel Peace Prize for championing the League of Nations, economist John Maynard Keynes said Wilson was ill informed about European politics and had a stubborn and uncompromising mind. Wilson ignored John Maynard Keynes’ plea for a lenient treatment of Germany and returned from Paris proclaiming Germany’s guilt, saying that the Versailles Treaty was the righteous punishment for one of the greatest wrongs ever done in history.”

“How did Owen’s establishment of the Federal Reserve Bank help the small farmers of Oklahoma?”

“When severe deflation set in right after the Great War, it devastated the farming regions of the country, especially Owen’s home state of Oklahoma. To compete in the industrial era, to buy mowing machines, reapers, and harvesters and pay the mortgages on their land, the farmer had to borrow. When the price of their produce fell, they couldn’t pay their loans. The banks foreclosed and the farmers lost their farms and became tenant workers. By the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one quarter of all farms were rented by tenants. The ones who had no money to rent land, became field laborers. White, black, and Indian farmers were in the same boat and it was sinking fast. While Owen believed that the primary objectives of the central bank was to maintain price stability, and to maintain moderate interest rates, the leaders of the Fed were focused on maintaining the international gold standard. During the demoralizing farming crisis, Owen called on the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates and provide enough liquidity to avoid deflation in a time of crisis.

“But the government,” Les said, slapping his long fingers on the table, “didn’t listen to Owen. They listened to the bankers whose gospel was deflation and more deflation. Despite the economic failures of the farmers, the Fed held to their policy, defending the rise in interest rates as the best way to reverse the inflation of prices that had increased during the war, and restore the gold standard to prewar gold prices. The bankers were protecting themselves and didn’t give a damn about the small farmer. Owen spent his last years in the Senate criticizing Fed policy, saying that when the value of the dollar can be doubled or halved over a short time, there’s something radically crazy with our monetary laws which allows a violent fluctuation in the purchasing power of money.

“After Owen failed to win the Democratic nomination for president, the Republicans won the election,





Robert Latham Owen, Senator, Oklahoma, 1910 – U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

putting William Howard Taft in the White House and taking control of Congress leaving Owen with a snowball's chance in hell in changing monetary policy. Despite Owen's strenuous protests on the floor of the Senate, under the pretext of lowering the cost of living, the bankers demanded a contraction of credit and currency which left the farmers in misery for several years."

"Robert Owen, I said, "proved how effective an Indian legislator could be at the highest level of government."

"One of Owen's greatest accomplishment," Les said, "was the passage of the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act which was supported by the National Child Labor Committee and signed into law by Woodrow Wilson in 1916.

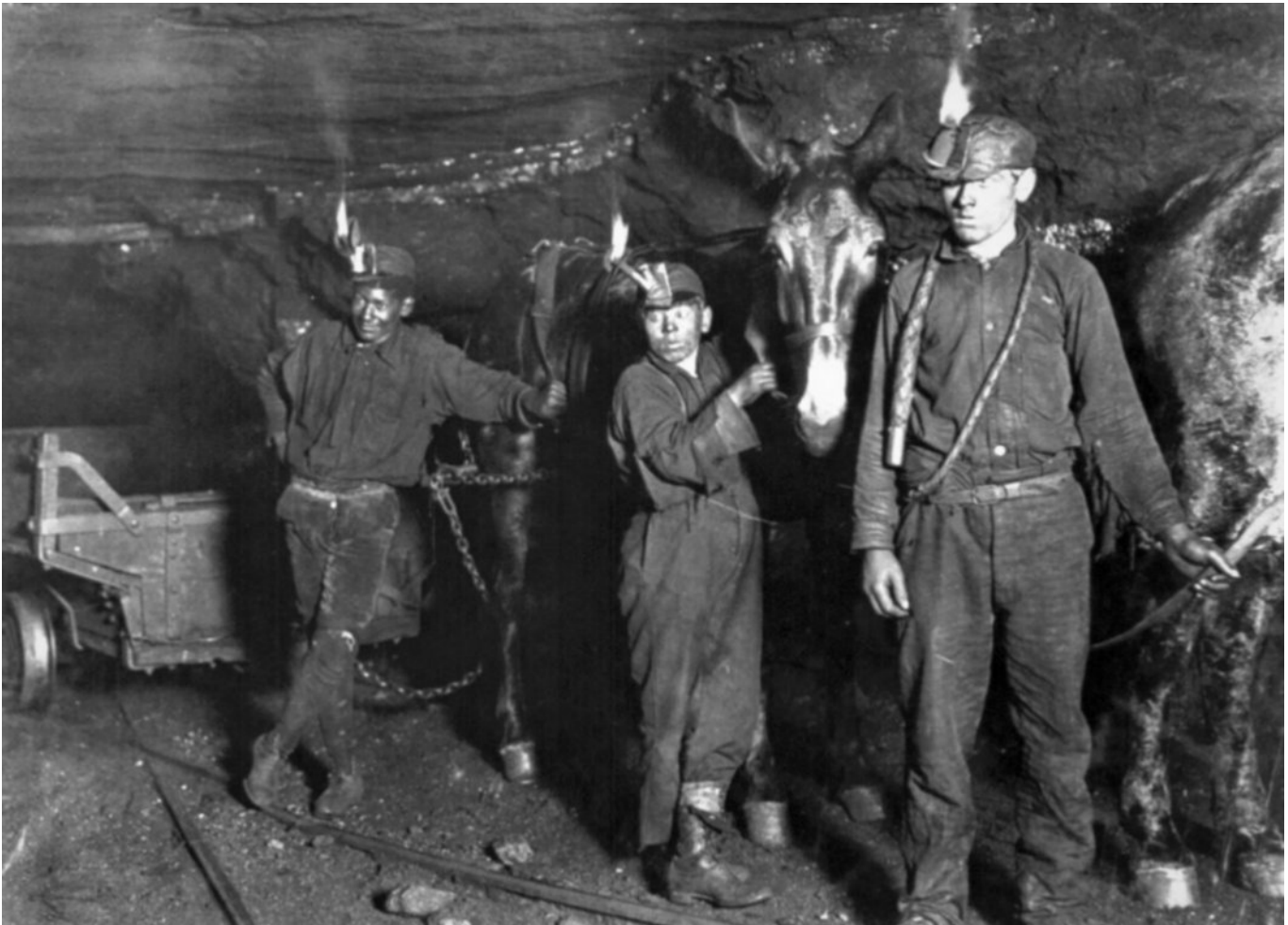
“What did Owen’s Child Labor Act accomplish?”

“It prohibited the sale of goods across state borders that were produced in factories employing children under fourteen. Under the Secretary of Labor, inspectors would make spontaneous visits to factories and enforce the prohibition of child labor by fines or imprisonment.”

“You mean, children were working in American factories in 1916?”

“It was common. The 1900 census documented that 2 million children were working in agricultural fields, mills, coal mines, and factories. The photographs of Lewis Hine brought to the nation’s attention the conditions of children working sixty and seventy hours a week under unsanitary and dangerous conditions. The parents were so poorly paid that they had to put their children to work to feed their family. The kids working in the factory had no education and grew up illiterate without exercise or even fresh air. Countless numbers of children were injured and killed in industrial accidents at rates three times that of adults.”

“What an outrage.”



Children working with mules in a West Virginia coal mine, 1908 – Photograph by Lewis Wickes Hine, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

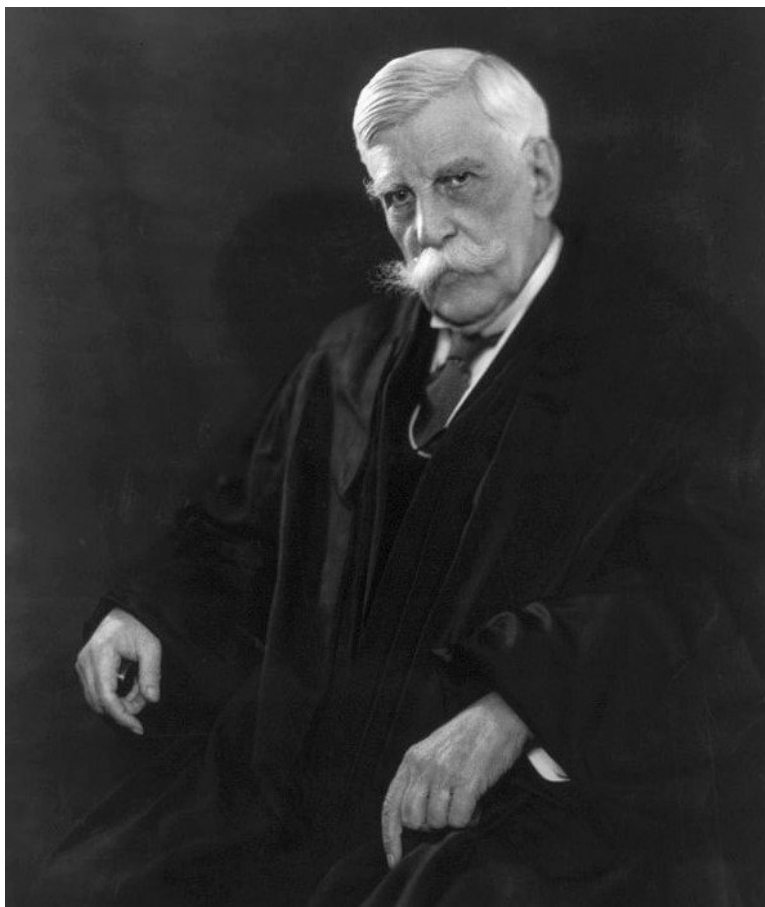


Addie Card, 12 years old, spinner in a Vermont Cotton Mill, 1910 – Photograph by Lewis Hine, public domain, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“*Oliver Twist*, written by Charles Dickens 60 years before, raised public consciousness on the economic exploitation of children. But believe it or not, within a year, the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court case, *Hammer v Dagenhart*, on the grounds that only the states had the right to regulate child labor. But Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes strongly dissented with the majority. Congress was completely within its right to regulate interstate commerce.”

“It goes to show how often the Supreme Court was dead wrong.”

“A constitutional amendment,” Les said, “was proposed to give Congress the right to regulate child labor, but business forces defeated it on the principle of states’ rights and propaganda that it was a communist plot to subvert the Constitution. It took a quarter of a century, before the Supreme Court’s ruling against the Keating-Owen Act was overturned. In 1941, the court cited Oliver Wendell Holmes dissent as the classic affirmation of children’s rights. Holmes viewed the United States Constitution as ‘an experiment, as all life is an experiment.’ Justice Holmes said that ‘if there is any subject which civilized nations have agreed upon, it is the evil of child labor.’



Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., circa 1930 – Photograph by Harris & Ewing, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“Even after the Oklahoma Senator’s retirement from the Senate, Robert Owen continued during the Great Depression to advocate easier access to loans for people trying to start a business. He said that civilization depends upon money without which man would be reduced to a primitive life of barter. I agree with Owen, there’s nothing more important for a citizen to understand than money and its power to control our destiny. You can’t discuss class, race, or politics without first looking at the economic picture,’ Les said. “That’s a fact, Gio, you must never forget. The farmers in Oklahoma understood that and it made many of them to turn towards socialism.”

“Socialism in Oklahoma?”

“Yes, indeed. With the price of their produce in the basement, farmers couldn’t make a living. Oklahoma had the largest Socialist voting population in the United States.”

“Incredible, Oklahoma is a conservative southern state.”

“The Oklahoma Socialist Party,” Les replied, “had had some success even before the war. In Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas there were fifty Socialist newspapers. County officials and even legislators were elected by the socialists in Oklahoma.”

“Wasn’t there a big backlash against Marxism?”

“That’s later. In the early days of the state, the Socialist Party was a big success because unlike other Southern states, the party reached out to black and American Indian voters. The Socialist Party was the only one to oppose the Jim Crow laws that had been passed throughout the South. They Christianized Marxism.”

“Christianized Marxism?”

“You can make a good case that Jesus Christ was an early Marxist,” Les explained. “Many of his sermons spoke out against the rich exploiting the poor. Christ believed that righteous people don’t exploit others. But Marxism had no use for religion. Marxist doctrine failed to delve into the mystery of life, death, and suffering. The socialists of Oklahoma transformed Marxist to accommodate their beliefs, combining Christian mysticism with the party’s belief in small-scale land ownership. The Oklahoma Socialist Party had more members than even in New York State. You could call it Marxist-Petite-Capitalism, wildly popular with Indians and blacks who awarded the Socialist Party’s candidate for president, Eugene Debs, the highest percentage of votes in Oklahoma than in the entire nation.”

“Wasn’t Debs,” I said, “the leader of the big railway strike?”

“Although he originally believed the union couldn’t win, Debs led the fight. When he was young, after his friend was killed by falling beneath a locomotive, Debs quit working for the railroads. Influenced by Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, Debs helped create the American Railway Union. Debs wanted to include blacks in the union, but the other leaders refused. We weren’t wanted. After the devastating Depression of 1893, the Pullman Palace Car Company severely cut the wages of their workers — wages which were pitiful in the first place. But the worst thing was that the company had no regard for safety. Each year, 2,000 workers were killed and 30,000 injured in railway accidents. Having lost his friend, Debs was outraged. However, he warned the workers, as bad as thing were, they would pay a heavy price if they went on strike.”

“Why would the leader try to talk them out of going on strike?”

“He said it was too risky considering all of the negatives.”

“What were the negatives?”

“More negatives than positives — the hostile railways had the ability to pay for thousands of deputies to bust the strike. The companies could bring other unions to break the strike. The railways had the upper hand



Workers leaving the Pullman Palace Car Works – Author, Pullman brochure *In The Story of Pullman*, 1893, public domain, Wikimedia

because they had the government in their pocket. While the strike was a brave idea, Debs said it was too dangerous. You have to remember that at that time, the railroad industry turned the wheels of America.”

“Even though Debs warned them of the consequences, they still went out on strike?”

“The workers boycotted any train hauling Pullman cars. Because all the trains were running Pullman cars, the strike shut down transportation across the nation.”

“I’m afraid to ask, what happened?”



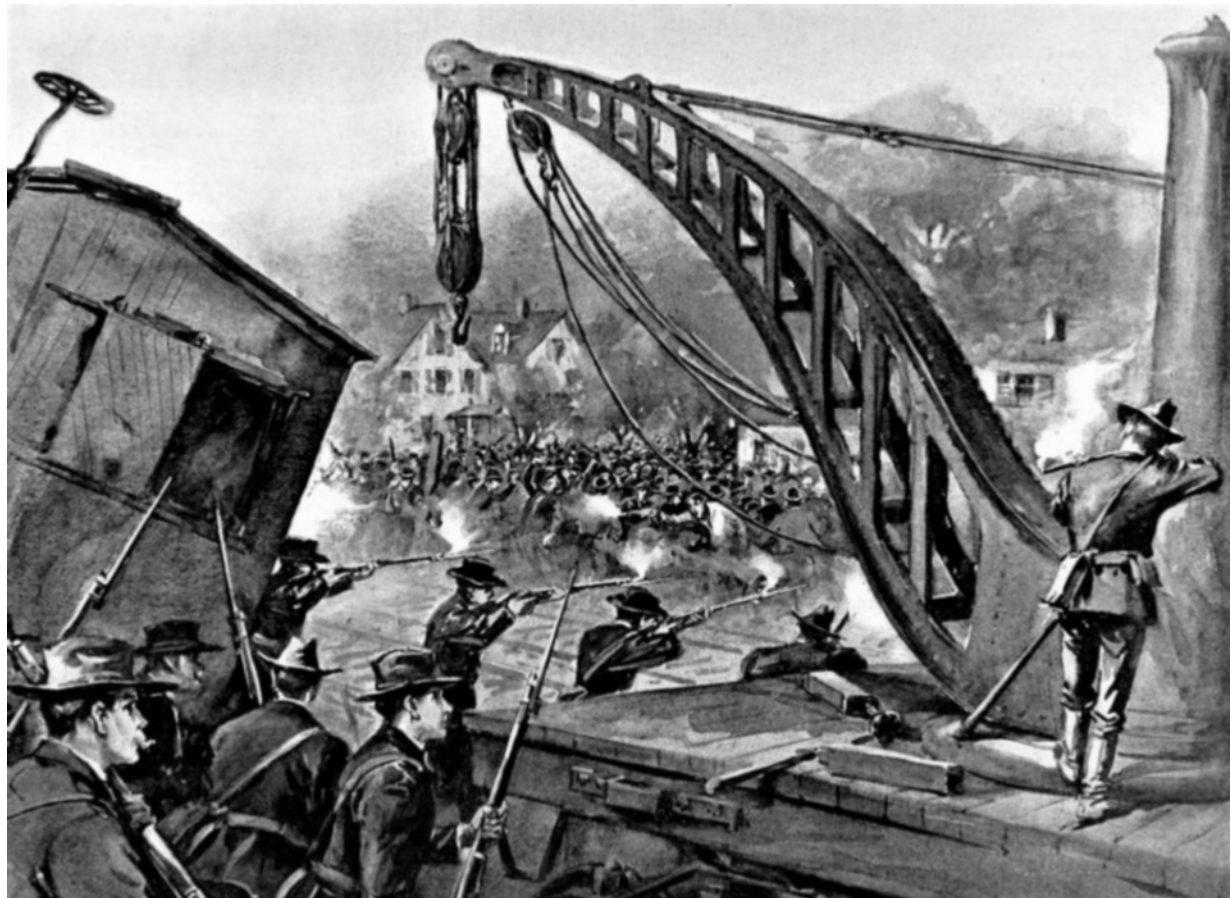
Political cartoon from the Chicago Labor newspaper, 7 July 1894. The working man is crushed between high rent and low wages by the Pullman Company – Author, *Chicago Labor Newspaper*, public domain, Wikimedia



Pullman Railroad Strike, 1894. The Illinois National Guard is protecting the Arcade Building in Pullman, South Side, Chicago – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia.



The American Railway Union, founded in 1893 by Eugene V. Debs, escalated the Pullman strike by blockading the Grand Crossing in Chicago, 26 June 1894 – Painting by Walker, *Harpers Weekly*, 14 July 1894, Wikimedia



Illinois National Guardsmen firing at striking Pullman workers, 7 July, 1894 – Painting by G. W. Peters from a sketch by G. A. Coffin, *Harpers Weekly*, 21 July 1894, Public domain, Wikimedia. 30 workers were murdered by the Illinois National Guard and strike breakers hired by Pullman.



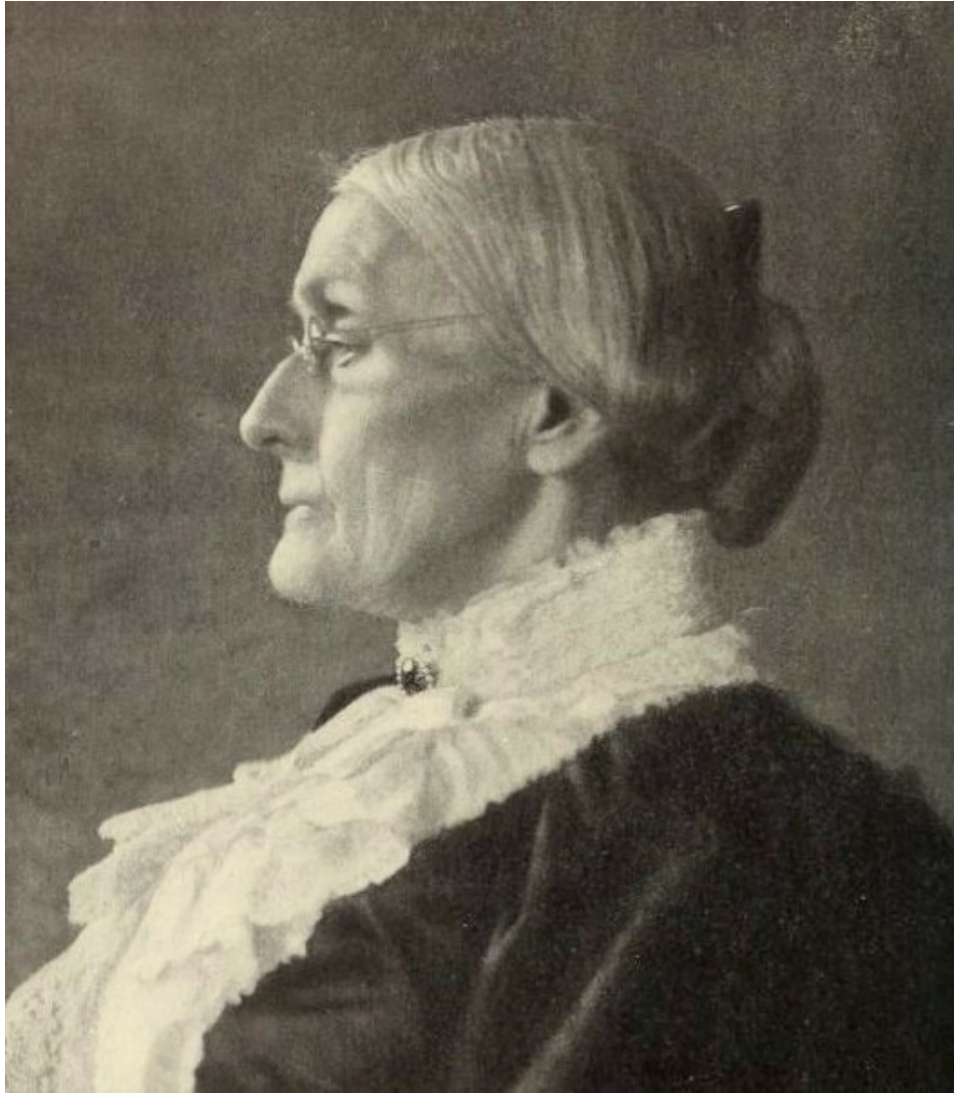
“The Attorney General, a former lawyer for the railroads, got an injunction against the strike on the grounds that the strikers were stopping the federal mail. The workers refused to go back to work and President Cleveland ordered troops into Chicago. When 5,000 strikers burned hundreds of railroad cars, the army and state militia charged, firing at random, stabbing the crowd with bayonets, trapping them against a fence, clubbing them without mercy. Fourteen thousand police, militia, and police crushed the strike. Called the Debs Rebellion, the *New York Times* ran an editorial labeling Debs as ‘a lawbreaker at large, an enemy of the human race.’ Debs was sentenced to six months in prison during which time he began studying socialism. Once he got out, he declared, ‘I’m for Socialism because I’m for humanity. We’re cursed by the reign of gold. It’s time to regenerate society.’

“Women were beginning to enter the workforce in great numbers working under brutal foremen, suffering from extreme heat, breathing chemically poisoned air, 14 even 17 hours a day for three dollars a week. Socialist leader, Kate O’Hare from Kansas, was one of those who united socialism and feminist suffrage.



Kate Richards O'Hare, 1915 – Photograph by Bain, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia. O'Hare was convicted and sent to prison for giving an anti-war speech in Bowman, North Dakota. She was judged guilty of violating the Espionage Act of 1917 for interfering with recruitment of U.S. troops. In the Missouri State Penitentiary O'Hare began working with the anarchists Emma Goldman and Gabriella Segata to improve prison conditions, Wikimedia.

“Socialist women were in the forefront in opposing the cruelty of child labor, petitioning the President. But Theodore Roosevelt refused to meet with them. While the mass magazines painted the picture of women as wife and homemaker, women were going to college, becoming doctors, professors, lawyers, and architects. Feminist Susan Anthony told Debs, ‘Give us suffrage, and we’ll give you socialism.’ Debs fired back, “Give us socialism and we’ll give you suffrage.””



Portrait of Susan B. Anthony taken in 1900 at the age of 80, 13 June 1913 – Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, *The World's Work*, 1906, public domain, Wikimedia. Born into a Quaker family committed to social equality, Susan B. Anthony was protesting slavery at the age of 17. Committed to fighting for women’s rights, in 1878, Susan Anthony and her friend Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented to Congress an amendment giving women the right to vote. Sen. Aaron A. Sargent, a Republican from California, sponsored it in Congress. Popularly known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, 18 August 1920, giving women the right to vote. Unfortunately, the Nineteenth Amendment did not truly enfranchise African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American women. In 1901, women trying to register to vote in Birmingham, Alabama were beaten by police. Threats of violence, job loss, and legal restrictions prevented women of color from voting. In 1901, the Twenty-fourth Amendment prohibited national or state governments from making a poll tax or any other tax, a requirement to vote, which led three years later to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, vote suppression of people of color continues to this day

“Yvonne told me about the tenant farmers and sharecroppers of Oklahoma who passionately supported Debs’ run for President. Like his fellow socialist, Jules Jaurès in France, Debs was one of the great orators of his day. He told the workers that the ruling classes declare the wars and the working class fight the wars. By calling on workers to resist the war, the government charged him with violating the Espionage Act. Yvonne told me that on his appeal before the Supreme Court, Justice Oliver Wendell Homes ruled that Debs had violated the Espionage Act by his intention to obstruct execution of the draft. The great leader who’d ran five time for president, was sentenced to 10 years in a penitentiary. But tell me, after becoming so strong in Oklahoma, what caused the Socialists to fail?”



Eugene V. Debs speaking against the war in Canton, Ohio in 1918, shortly before being arrested for sedition and imprisoned – Unknown author, public domain, Wikimedia. Eugene Debs was a major force in founding the ARU, the American Railway Union, one of America’s first industrial unions. In 1894, Debs led the workers of the Pullman Palace Car Company in the Pullman Strike to protest wage cuts and rent increases in company housing. The ARU’s boycott of all railroads using Pullman coaches, which meant most railroads, stopped work for a quarter million workers in twenty-seven states. President Grover on the pretext of keeping the mail going, called in the U.S. Army to break the strike. Debs was convicted of breaking a court injunction that had forbidden the strike and served six months in prison.



Cartoon of Eugene Deb's 1920 Presidential run from prison – Cartoon by Clifford K. Berryman, U.S. Library of Congress, public domain, Wikimedia

“In the presidential election,” Les said, “the Socialist Party in Seminole and Pontotoc Counties had picked up one quarter of the vote, an impressive showing for socialists. But World War One brought a lot of changes to America. Most of it not good. After Lenin’s Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, anti-communist hysteria paranoia swept over the U.S. bringing repression down on anyone who spoke against the war or capitalism.”

“Yvonne mentioned the Green Corn Rebellion in Oklahoma.”

“It was the tenant farmer’s protest against the government’s Selective Draft Act of 1917. Like most protests, the rebellion had economic roots. The farmers of Oklahoma, both black and white and Indian were mostly tenant farmers, young men mainly in their 20s and 30s who ploughed less fertile land, dirt farmers trapped between a rock and a hard place, crushed by the heavy crop liens of the landlords and the exploitative credit system of the stores.”

“What were the crop liens?”

“The lien system was the most brutal in the South. The farmer didn’t have enough cash to buy seeds and equipment and the use of the cotton gin at harvest time, so the merchant would advance the farmer a lien, a mortgage on his crop with interest as high as 25%. Year by year the farmer would fall deeper in debt until his farm was taken from him by the merchant.

“In the summer of 1917, the Socialist Party’s antiwar protests drew thousands of people. The socialists told the workers and farmers that military conscription was an invasion of their rights. The tenant farmers were being used as cannon fodder to enrich the capitalists. ‘You’re a fool to go to war with Germany,’ the socialists said. ‘It’s a rich man’s war, a poor man’s death.’ The tenant farmers were young, the ones to be taken by the draft. These white, black, and Indian farmers were struggling with a depleted condition of the soil which was far less productive rather than the delta of Mississippi and Louisiana. The draft would have taken these poor tenant farmers off the land, allowing the banks to foreclose on those who owned land, leaving their women and children impoverished. There only hope was to protest conscription to fight a foreign war. After the draft lottery in the summer of 1917, the Seminoles, Muscogee Creeks, poor white and black tenant farmers, met on the banks of the South Canadian River to cross the country on foot, eating green corn for nourishment, marching on Washington to repeal the draft.



The Canadian River in central Oklahoma, not far from the location of the repressed Green Corn Rebellion – Photograph by an unknown employee of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, public domain, Wikimedia. The author’s grandparents, Willis Edward Pelton, and Mary Agatha McCant Pelton staked a claim during the Oklahoma Land Rush built a cabin and planted crops on the Canadian River near the assault on the tenant farmers of the Green Corn Rebellion. In 1890, The Canadian River formed part of the boundary between Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory.

A Seminole-Muscogee Creek woman whose uncle had been imprisoned for the rebellion, said “The full moon of late July, early August it was, the Moon of the Green Corn. It was not easy to persuade our poor white and black brothers and sisters to rise up. We told them that rising up, standing up, whatever the consequences, would inspire future generations. Our courage, our bravery would be remembered and copied. That has been the Indian way for centuries, since the invasions. Fight and tell the story so that those who come after or their descendants will rise up once again. It may take a thousand years, but that is how we continue and eventually prevail.” From Davis Joyce and Fred R. Harris, p. 224 – *Alternative Oklahoma: contrarian views of the Sooner State*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007.

“Turned in by a planted informer, an armed posse of city folk stopped the tenant farmers, killing some, sending several hundred to jail and sentencing leaders to 10 years in prison. The right-wing seized on the rebellion to portray the socialist Industrial Workers of the World as revolutionaries who were betraying America. The Socialist Party of Oklahoma was knocked down by a mass hysteria aroused by anti-socialist propaganda. The party never recovered from the communist scare and the accusation of being anti-American.

“When the progressive Democratic Senator from Oklahoma, Robert Owens retired in 1924, the election went to a Republican, W. B. Pine, a millionaire oil man from Okmulgee. Supported by the Ku Klux Klan, Pine became the champion for those who owned the land. When the farmers began getting good money for their crops, some started voting with the rich people, but the tenant farmers were terminally trapped under the landowners’ heel. If you didn’t own land in America, you were nobody. Pine, the millionaire oil man elected to the Senate in 1924, reflects the oil industry’s influence on Oklahoma politics until today.”

“Your story,” I said, “reminds me of the songs of Woody Guthrie. One night in Budapest, Attila turned me on to Woody’s music. I’d never heard of the cat before, but I discovered that during the days of the Great Depression, Woody traveled with the farmers fleeing from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl on their way to California. Born on Bastille Day in a little town in Okfuskee County, as a kid, Woody mastered the guitar and harmonica by ear. When his papa went to work in Texas, leaving Woody behind, he begged for meals in Okemah, sleeping here and there, playing tunes for change. On the way to California, the wanderer picked up Okie folk and blues songs. Woody was a man fighting for the common people. I remember the words of *This Land is Your Land* — ‘As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking, is this land made for you and me?’ Woody had a slogan pasted on his guitar, ‘This machine kills fascists.’

“A great number of American song writers have been influenced by Woody. A musician who couldn’t help wandering, he began collaborating in Brooklyn with Yiddish dancer and poet, Marjorie Greenblatt. Jewish culture in the 40’s was bubbling with modern dance, poetry, and socialist activism. Right after high school Marjorie joined the Martha Graham Dance Company dancing in *Primitive Mysteries* and *Appalachian Spring*, and after being Graham’s assistant for fifteen years, Marjorie was given the right to teach the Graham technique outside the company and two of her students were Erick Hawkins and Merce Cunningham. When Woody’s health began to crack due to Huntington’s Disease, a fatal genetic disorder where nerve cells in the brain slowly break down, she cared for him. When he lost the ability to control his muscles and his voice, Marjorie taught

Woody to communicate by blinking his eyes. It was a terrible thing for a musician not to be able to play his instrument. As different as their backgrounds were, inspired by her, Woody wrote songs that flowed from his rapport with Marjorie Greenblatt — the oppression of Jews and tenant farmers.”



Oklahoma songwriter Woody Guthrie, 8 March 1943 – Photograph by Al Aumuller, World Telegram, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia. The U.S. Library of Congress has archived many of his recorded songs. Woody has influenced the music of Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Johnny Cash, John Mellencamp, Pete Seeger, Jerry Garcia, and Bruce Springsteen.



Woody Guthrie's Okfuskee County, Oklahoma childhood home – Photograph by Walter Smalling, Historic American Buildings Survey, U.S. Library of Congress, Wikimedia

“The 40’s were a great time for music,” Les said, leaning back and stretching out his long legs. “What do you think of your croque-monsieur?”

“Your addiction is contagious,”

“Let’s get some exercise and walk up the hill to the Cabaret Au Lapin Agile. There’s a fine accordionist playing there.”