



Blood on the Tracks

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The Great Railroad Strike of 1877 wrenched American history onto a new course. Focusing on events in Baltimore and Pittsburgh, this essay brings this dramatic and bloody confrontation to life, as ordinary people, driven to the wall by oppression, rose against their masters. This was the opening act in long years of savage struggle for the rights of labor that continue to this day.

Blood on the Tracks Details

Date : Published June 15th 2011

ISBN :

Author : Cecelia Holland

Format : Kindle Edition 79 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Labor, Short Stories

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From Reader Review Blood on the Tracks for online ebook

Barbara Folk says

I'm just about finished this short "essay" and I wanted to get my thoughts down before I get to the part where it just ends, as some of the other reviews have stated.

First: Yes, there are parallels to the current economic situation, but I'm certainly not sure if the actions taken by the citizens in 1877 would work in any way currently. Our police are better armed, our military is better armed, and both are better trained. But in concluding that "authority" will be the victor, I just had to think back 21 years ago during the LA Riots after the Rodney King trial to know that there's a strong possibility that angry citizens would and could overwhelm our police and military, even if only for a few days.

That being the case, I'm stuck in my awkward position of being unable to advocate for either side. And here are my spoilers.

(view spoiler)

I'm left wondering how to take this information and turn it into something useful. How to remind employers (who are now only working for the stockholders) that you can't continue to squeeze your employees until they can no longer support themselves? How to convince people who aren't involved to do the right thing (whatever that may be) and not incite a more damaging situation? How to remind the government, the lawmakers, the "authority" that regardless of the "subversive" tactics of the rioters, they are still citizens and do not deserve to die so that a company can profit?

The complaints in many of the reviews seem to be that there's no answer. I agree, there isn't. It's sad that this history is forgotten, so that riots happen again and again in order to redress a wrong. I'd love to hear a solution that takes into account the needs of both sides.

Daniel says

Excellent history that few people know. In those days, the railroads could get up to mischief. For instance, they charged less to ship the same amount of freight from Chicago to Philadelphia, than to ship it to Pittsburgh. I think they wanted to extract higher rents from the presumably deeper pockets of the steel producers. Many people also resented the railroads, because one effect of long-distance freight was that you

could supply the entire country with high-quality widgets from a single factory in Ohio, thereby throwing many local widget-producers out of business in towns all across the nation -- the 19th-century version of the Wal-Mart effect.

The precipitating event for the strike was that the biggest six railroad owners got together and all decided to reduce wages 10% across the board. Workers went on strike, and seized various parts of the infrastructure; Railroad management called out the militias. In those days, there were various private-label armies around the country, that were sort of left over from the days of the Civil War; they were part-time semi-recreational organizations, not really combat soldiers; these days they'd be calling on Blackwater or other security contractors.

The militias were ordered to charge into the crowds; the crowds stood their ground and threw rocks; and at some point, the militias actually opened fire. At which point politicians got involved, because allowing gunfire upon civilians really meant allowing gunfire on registered voters, and to politicians that seemed like a bad idea.

Those kinds of tariff/wage mischief are illegal today, because politicians wrote government regulations to prohibit them. In the world of railroading, there are a whole host of overlapping regulations requiring fair tariffs and so on, prohibiting the railroads from charging different customers different prices; the 19th-century version of "Net Neutrality". And it turned out that once the regulations were written in such a way that you could ship a load of freight coast to coast in a boxcar owned by railroad A, pulled by an engine owned by railroad B, over tracks owned by railroads C, D, and E without requiring it to be switched and unloaded at every service boundary, all of a sudden the business gets much more efficient and thereby more profitable.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4* of five

I stayed up much too late reading this Kindle Single. Outrage and fury do that to me. Novelist Cecelia Holland tells the facts of this moment in history, the Railroad Strike of 1877, like the storyteller she's honed her skills to be.

My outraged shrieks can be read at Expendable Mudge Muses Aloud.

Diane says

This book initially attracted my interest as it was a true story and included Baltimore, MD. It's actually an essay rather than a book. Additionally, it was cheap enough I paid .99 for my Kindle edition. I'm not sorry that I read it because I learned a part of history of which I previously had no knowledge. Still, it was just one street/city fight/battle after another. By the end of the book they all seemed alike to me. I think I would have enjoyed this as a movie much better than the essay. Not bad writing... just a little boring.

Juliana says

This was a well-written book about the violent railroad strikes of 1877. America was in a Depression after the Civil War and the Railroad Barons had conspired on cutbacks that hurt the little guy. They went too far and the little guy fought back. There are some parallels to today's economic situation. At what point do we break? One per-centers should take heed.

This was one of the better Kindle Singles I've read. It fit the smaller format well with a focus on one historical event.

Marieke says

File under: things you didn't learn about in Social Studies or History classes. At least I didn't. Cecelia Holland emphasized worker's rights in this essay about a major railroad strike, highlighting the idea that it's easier to destroy something if you have no stake in it. She compared the causes and catalysts of this 1877 event (known as the Great Strike) with the current turbulence happening today in the United States. I definitely appreciated her concluding thoughts, but the theme that kept coming through to me was the government's willingness to do violence against its own people at the bidding of the powerful elite. We may be shaking our heads at recent and ongoing events in the middle east right now, but it has happened here, too, and this is not the only instance nor the most recent. And it's also not something we learn about in civics classes.

Chris says

This short kindle essay is about a railroad strike in the 1870s. It is rather interesting and detailed about an event in American history that people know little about. It also ties in nicely to the history of unions and the history of the working class.

James Lambert says

Having only learned of The Great Upheaval from The History Channel, it was quite interesting to read this essay on the subject. I do agree with a review I read that said watching it as a movie would have been a lot more entertaining though. A dark time in our history that lead to a boom that brought our country into the light of mass prosperity. Be great to revisit that in modern times, where we can once again have an astounding generation of prosperity for all, not just the 1%.

Laurie says

I probably wouldn't recommend this one and only give it 3 stars. It was about the great railway workers

strike of 1877 and how the workers rose up against those in power and the injustices of those with power and money. The only interesting part to me was the fact with our economy in its present state, the rates of unemployment along with the great divide between the rich and poor there are scary similarities. Makes one wonder what sort of upheaval our country will face to turn things around.

C.C. Thomas says

I don't know how to review this because I don't exactly know what it is about...some type of union or labor uprising that involved trains. And, I hate that because I love uprisings and overthrow of 'the man', especially when it is based on a true story!

Really, I'm sure this was based on an important topic and I don't mean to be so blithely shrugging away the death of innocent people but the writing and details were so convoluted that I felt like I was caught in a downpour of word drops without an umbrella.

I was attracted to this Kindle single because of the topic of history. This story concerns The Great Railroad Strike of 1877. I actually had to go back and look things up ON THE INTERNET (gasp!) because I learned so little from this book. Apparently, during the depression, the owners of the four biggest railroads in NY state cut workers' salaries by 10% and tried to break the unions while raking in huge profits. Sound similar to today? History does have a way of repeating itself.

I think this is an important topic but felt absolutely no connection to the story and just couldn't wait for it to be over.

Josh Hamacher says

The fascinating story of the railroad strikes of July 1877. Well worth reading.

Why did I give it only three stars? Two reasons: First, it's not particularly well-written and certain parts are just awkward to read. Second, there's no followup; it pretty much just ends with only a few paragraphs describing the aftermath. Just another page or two would have been great.

Blair Hodgkinson says

This kindle single gives good explanation in brief for the events of, leading up to, and resulting from the Great American Railway Strike of 1877.

Cecilia Holland writes in a clear and informative way and imparts her information easily to the reader.

Given the parallels between the labour situation in 1877 and current situations of rich/poor disparity around the world, this narrative becomes even more interesting and relevant.

Elizabeth C says

Fascinating History

I enjoyed learning more about a topic that one of my American history professors talked about many years ago. After that class, I'd always wanted to read something in depth about the topic. This book is the perfect fit for my curiosity, as it's brief enough to read in a few sessions but detailed enough to shed light on a topic too ignored by history. I especially appreciated the author's parallels between 1877 and the current era at the end. It's true, it's easy to destroy something in which one has no stake. For me, that summed up the main cause of the strike and successive riots very nicely.

Jayson says

Blood on the tracks tells the story that will not be found in most history books. It is the story of the bloody railroad strike of 1877. Although the strike was short lived, it served as the precursor for labor relations in the United States. The strike was spurred by the railroads imposing a ten percent salary cut on the labor force and a heavier work load. At the time, the railroad bosses were making a large majority of the profit produced by the rail system -mostly on the backs of the labor force.

Daphne says

Great little read from Kindle Singles. The audio version clocks in at just under 3 hours and the page count at under 75. In that little bit of time I learned about an entire event in history of the USA that I NEVER remember having learnt about in school or college. Mass death, carnage, fire, and riots ensued. I suppose it was all fun and games until a militia member shot through the knee of a little four yro girl that wasn't even close to the fight. Girl gets her leg amputated and died later. Not the best of times.

Grab this one if you are interested in a little bite-size piece of American history.
