Hobos, Wheat, and Climate Precarity, 1870–1922

Edwin Brown had an eye for tragedy. A social reformer, he traveled the country in the spring of 1909 in search of the answer to a simple question: "why is there poverty and suffering amidst abundance and plenty?"[1] In that journey, he witnessed hundreds of little tragedies and horrors, from destitution to death and disease to wrongful imprisonment and starvation. It is striking, then, how much he lamented the plight of a boy he met in Kansas City, "starving and shelterless… down and out, ill-used, yet ever ready at the first suggestion of hope to rush again into life's battle."[2]

What had driven the boy to the edge of starvation? Like tens of thousands of other boys, men, and women, he had made his way to Kansas City to participate in the single largest migratory workforce in the United States at the time: the wheat harvests of the Great Plains. Tilling fields hundreds of miles from most labor pools, Kansas farmers paid a premium for hands to harvest their wheat—$2 to $4 a day, for about a month. It was the sort of money that allowed a person a little security—even an entire season—before finding their next job. But the boy had come a few weeks too early. Out of work and waiting for the harvests to start, he was at the mercy of unsympathetic policemen and poor houses too full to accept him.[3] His error was he had arrived exactly when the harvests usually started. "It has been such a cold, late Spring," he explained to Brown—the harvests had been delayed by rain.[4]

Harvest hands routinely met with such a fate; they came to the Great Plains wheat harvest with reports of certain climatic and crop conditions and found them changed at the very last moment. In this article, I argue that an unpredictable climate made the labor demands of the wheat harvest similarly unpredictable, forcing farmers to rely on migrant workers. It was a system no one quite wanted. Farmers preferred to recruit familiar faces if

they could—but the vagaries of Great Plains climate ensured that no one had thse same number of job openings from year to year. Railroad companies disliked the surge of migrant traffic, as the impoverished workers routinely stole rides on their routes, often leading to deadly accidents—but the biology of grain plants ensured that harvest time required a huge influx of human labor for a month's worth of work. And migrants found themselves at the mercy of a work regime that demanded precarity, demanded they travel to the Plains without really knowing if there was a job on the other side for them—but the intersection of climate and capitalism meant no safety net. The harvest had no architect—it was an emergent property of the Great Plains environment and economy.[5]

Harvest work in Great Plains agriculture looked little like that of other United States agricultural systems. Farmers on the East Coast employed migrant workers, but the climate of the Eastern seaboard had relatively little variability, and the regularity of the work meant regularity of the workers. The East Coast thus tended to rely on European immigrant workforces recruited by padrones.[6] The South, likewise, lacked the Plains' unpredictability, and its valuable cotton crop required far more consistent attention than the wheat of the Great Plains; its farmers kept bonded labor around in the form of sharecroppers.[7] Even California, although roughly as arid as the Great Plains, specialized in valuable perennial crops supplemented with vast irrigation networks, allowing them to rely on long-term migrants who stayed year after year: first Chinese and Japanese laborers, and finally, Mexican-American migrants.[8] Only in the Great Plains did climate and crop create such a striking seasonal migration.

These harvest hands typically numbered in the tens of thousands, with roughly 50,000 making the annual journey from eastern states to the Great Plains in the 1890s and

1900s, and over 100,000 regularly arriving by the late 1910s. However, the number of jobs available rarely matched that number neatly: in drought years, less than 10,000 jobs might be available to out-of-state workers, while rainy years required upwards of 150,000.[9] Like other migrant workers in the region, harvest hands were overwhelmingly American-born and predominantly white.[10] Most of them were the itinerant underclass of migrant laborers—so-called "hobos"—a group who circulated through the Midwest, Great Plains, and Mountain West, providing vital ad hoc labor in agriculture, mining, forestry, and construction. Hobos often worked on any given job for less than a week, never settling in a single place for long. Their itinerancy and homelessness caused them to live outside the law, and they were often forced to steal train rides illegally between jobs, camping alongside the tracks; they were always in danger of being beaten, imprisoned, or turfed to another town by suspicious local police or townspeople. Although some writers (and many harvest hands themselves) attempted to differentiate the honest "harvest hand" from the lazy "hobo," the bulk of harvest work was likely undertaken by that group.[11]

Frank Higbie, Carlos Schwantes, and Mark Wyman show hobos were crucial figures in the wheat harvest, their temporary work indispensable to making it function.[12] Nigel Sellars and Greg Hall note these workers were early forerunners of agricultural unionization.[13] Cindy Hahamovitch, meanwhile, cites Great Plains farming as the earliest major example of migratory agricultural work.[14] However, these historians have given little attention to the particularities of Great Plains environments.[15] Inversely, Western environmental historians have largely overlooked hobos in their analysis. William Cronon's exploration of wheat details the ways that the process of making wheat into an industrial product insulated the consumer entirely from the production process, but focuses more or

less exclusively on farmers rather than their laborers.[16] Economic historian Gavin Wright mostly regards the hobo as an outlier in the story of how mechanization killed a nascent American agricultural proletariat.[17] And while Thomas Isern's *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs* brings together the Plains, the harvest, and hobos, Isern's analysis elides significant historical changes over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—changes that I argue were environmentally driven.[18] By bringing together labor and environmental history with climatological and digitized newspaper records, this article aims to provide a much more comprehensive analysis of how climate shaped the wheat harvest.

I begin by exploring the biological dimensions of wheat plants, the way they shaped a political ecology distinctive to the Great Plains, and the role of the hobo in this political ecology in the years after the Civil War.[19] Then, I turn to the greatest environmental challenge the hobo work regime faced in its early history—the drought of the 1890s—to show how hobos operated as the perfect adaptation to environmental variability. Finally, I turn to the continuation of the work regime into the early twentieth century, examining which aspects of the system persisted and which ones evolved, as well as the increasingly embittered labor relations in the wake of the ruinous drought.

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On the Ecology of a Grain Field

The wheat fields of the Great Plains were and are the product of a ten-thousand-year partnership between a grass plant (originally from the Middle East) and hominids (originally from East Africa) to increase the odds of survival of each. In exchange for humans preserving, distributing, and planting its seeds at the optimal depth year after year, the wheat plant offers a protein-rich and calorie-dense cluster of seeds, which can be ground into a fine,

powdery flour and baked into bread. Both species have leveraged this partnership to become some of the most successful organisms on the planet; neither one's near-term survival is in any doubt. By offloading work onto each other—protection and transportation to the human, and converting sunlight into stored energy to the wheat plant—each benefits enormously.[20]

But the actual mechanics and timing of this process get quite complex, quickly. Wheat can only grow in the temperate zone of the planet. It does not tolerate moisture well, but it also requires at least 20 inches of rain a year—spaced evenly through the growing season.[21] To store calories in the form of seeds, it requires consistent sunlight, and needs to extract elements from its environment: carbon and oxygen from the air, and a whole suite of rarer elements—especially nitrogen and phosphorous—from the complex assemblage of living things we usually call "soil."[22] Wheat is, put bluntly, an especially greedy plant in this regard: completely healthy soils can be entirely ruined after only a few years of wheat planting, their nitrogen and phosphorous entirely vanished into food calories.[23] In other words, wheat's place in ecology is an extractive one, requiring either other plants to regenerate the soil between plantings, or newly-conquered earth to plunder. In the United States, this extraction manifested as a westward advance alongside white settler colonists. Enriched by centuries of careful Indigenous horticulture, this settler colonial bounty of dirt ensured wheat planted at these western fringes grew incredibly well.[24] Every conquest brought new soils ripe for extraction by settler colonists and their wheat plant allies.

The conquest of the Great Plains brought the wheat frontier in contact with a wildly variable climate and a resilient grasslands ecology (with prairie root systems that resisted conventional plows). Settlers required new plows to break the prairie sod, and brought biotechnologies to resist drought. "Turkish Red" wheat, imported from Crimea in the 1870s,

and Marquis wheat, hybridized by a Canadian chemist in the 1890s, were both drought tolerant and high yield. Hundreds of other varieties cropped up across the United States, some of them emerging from rogue wheat plants self-hybridizing in rural fields, each being planted to adapt to extremely specific environmental and climatological conditions. But Turkish Red and Marquis reigned supreme: dominating the Great Plains, they made up nearly half the total acreage of wheat sown nationally in 1920.[25]

Great Plains wheat fields even looked different from their eastern counterparts. Vast, flat, and seemingly featureless, the Plains lent themselves to incredibly vast, square fields, proliferating seemingly without constraint by topography, facilitating endless rectangles of hyper-rational agriculture, organized by no logic other than pure capitalism.[26] They decimated prairie ecology. Indigenous mammals and birds survived primarily in the borders between fields, where shrubs and trees grew up over the decades.[27] Larger mammals were slaughtered by rifle and habitat destruction.[28] The suppression of prairie fires brought trees back to the Plains, while the constant upturn of soils destroyed insect populations and decimated most plant species, paving the way for a ragweed boom, much to the consternation of allergic humans across the continent.[29] Wheat agriculture had become the apotheosis of monoculture—in many places Great Plains farmers grew virtually nothing else. They would eat their own wheat, but largely relied on others to supply most of their needs. Market pressures of cash crops meant fields on the Great Plains were overwhelmingly one type of grain per region—any harvest work would happen for only one plant, very nearly all at once.[30]

The clearest pressure this vast biome was the climate. The grasslands climate was notoriously fickle—enough to send settler society into crisis. The magnitude of these

disasters is visible in the rest of this article. While continuing settlement meant the overall trend was upwards, grain harvests in the west could fall by more than a third from year to year, as they did from 1889 to 1890; these losses were clearly correlated with the occurrence of drought, both in contemporary reports and in modern reconstructions. Such plummets happened at least once every five years between 1870 and 1890, the same period when the hobo work regime rose. In short, a region-wide failed harvest was a frequent occurrence. To see the impact this had on hobos, we must turn to harvest work—which was itself the product of pure muscle.

Indeed, agriculture was industrialized and mechanized long before it was de-muscled. The late nineteenth century farm scaled up operations through division of labor and partial automation. Reaping switched from scythes to dedicated machines, as did threshing, binding, and various other processes.[31] While this trend was most visible on big farms like the "bonanza farms" of North Dakota, it was also true of quite small family farms.[32] Yet all of these mechanical devices required muscle power—horses to draw the reapers and combines; human hands to direct the animals and operate machinery like threshers and binders.[33] These tasks required increasingly discrete bits of skill, and while farmers might opt for harvest hands who already had the "knack" for certain tasks, it didn't take long to get anyone up to speed.[34] Farming had come to rely on cheap, interchangeable workers.

Agriculture's exclusive use of muscle power was nothing new—agricultural work remained overwhelmingly muscle-powered between colonial times and the 1920s, mostly using slightly more animals and fewer humans over that period.[35] In colonial and Antebellum America, however, when work demands ballooned during the harvest time, a farmer would simply hire or beg their neighbors to come work in their fields—even those who weren't

professional farmers.[36] But on the grasslands, there simply *weren't enough neighbors* to meet harvest demands. The population density of a typical western agricultural state—Kansas—was less than 20 percent of one like Ohio in 1890.[37] Farms grew larger to pad against potential losses from drought—indeed, the size of homesteads was expanded for exactly this reason—but more fields required more muscle at the harvest all the same.[38] On the Great Plains and prairies, therefore, workers had to be hired from much farther away. There was simply a shortage of muscle.

Still, the birth of the harvest hand was a gradual one. In the 1860s, the scant evidence suggests harvest hands usually came from within their own state, hired from cities and towns to help local farmers.[39] Farmers *might* travel to places as exotic as neighboring Indian Reservations.[40] Over the course of the 1870s, "harvest hands" began to regularly travel from farther and farther afield in towns in Kansas, especially, and later on in Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Indian Territory (what would become Oklahoma). By the 1890s, it was clearly a national phenomenon, coupled with the general rise of "tramping," with thousands of itinerant laborers migrating to the Great Plains to help in the harvest. Many began in Kansas and work their way northward with the ripening grain, working in field after field before settling in with a threshing crew and working through the autumn. Others would work in a very circumscribed area before returning home.[41]

The organization of these harvest crews began as fairly egalitarian. Farmers—both owners and tenants alike—usually worked with their families right alongside harvest hands, except for the very largest farms. Hands often ate at the family dinner table, and though they slept in the barn or haystacks rather than the house, the wheat harvest was probably the kindest version of itinerant labor in this period—a true outlier—until the late 1890s.[42]

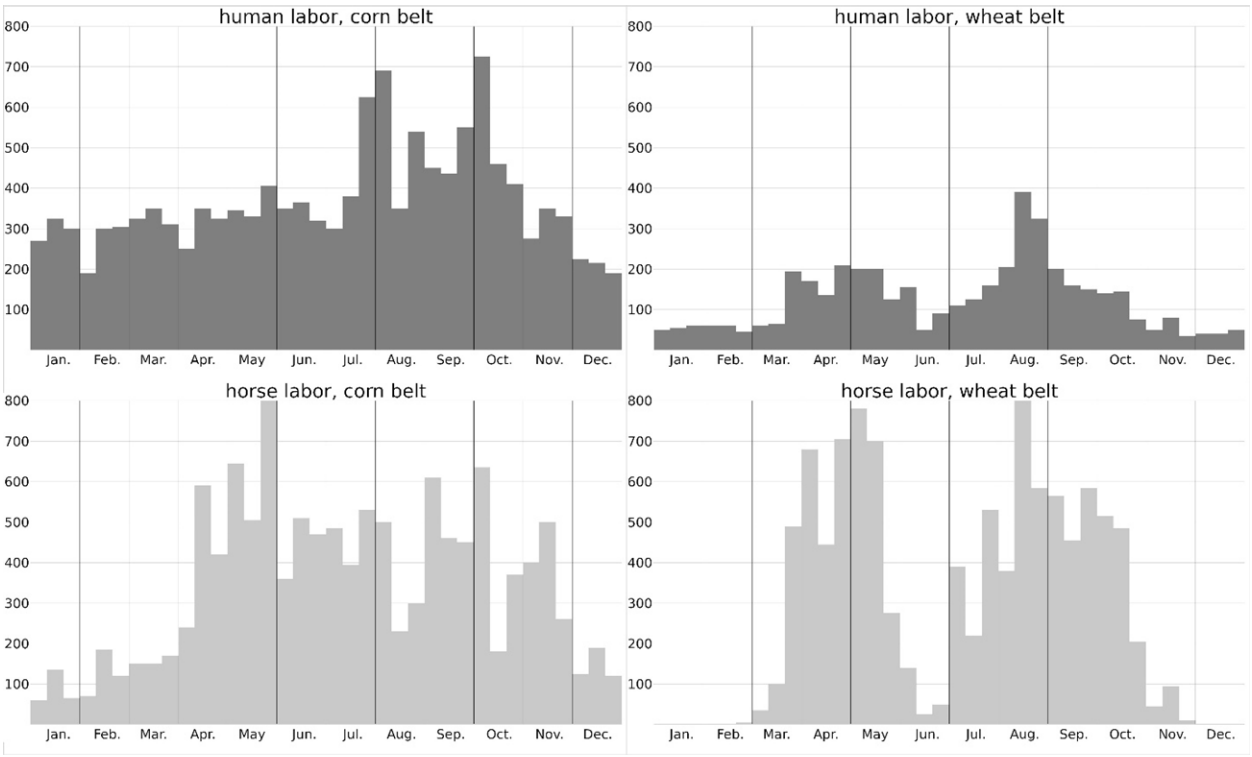

Figure 1. Chart: Hours of Labor on Wheat and Maize Farms, 1917. *Note the labor demands of a maize farm are quite uniform throughout a year, whereas the wheat farm has extremely concentrated demands for human labor around the time of the harvest. Other farms surveyed in the Yearbook had even higher contrasts, and on non-mechanized farms, demand could range as high as 20–30 times the "normal" during harvest.* Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, *1917 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), pp. 544–5.*[43]

No matter how it was organized, harvest work required multiple steps to get from intact grain plants to millable wheat kernels. In order, these were: 1) reaping—cutting grain stalks from the ground; 2) either binding and shocking, or heading—each a process of gathering the cut stalks into larger piles to dry and handle in bulk; 3) winnowing—separating the wheat from the chaff; and 4) threshing—putting wheat and chaff into separate piles. Each of these came with their own skills and labors. Reaping was usually done by a horse-drawn reaper, requiring a driver and several rakers to keep the reaper clean. Binding involved the laborious process of tying knots, first in metal wire and later in twine, while shocking and heading were two distinct arts of stacking grain—each suited for slightly

different weather conditions. Winnowing and threshing generally lasted for two months after the harvest, shifting stacks into steam-powered or horse-driven threshers.[44] Each of these specific labor forms were intimately intertwined with the biology of the wheat plant—few grains required as much labor to get from plant to edible food. Instead, labor was often concentrated on simply keeping a plant alive through the year.

After the harvest, many migrants stayed on to work with threshing crews. Threshing machines, unlike most on-field agricultural engines, could be big, bulky, and powerful, as they only had to be moved into one place before separating one pile into two. As they were massive, bulky, and expensive, very few farms owned their own. Outside threshing companies were usually contracted by groups of farmers, who supplied their own hands to stay on and work the two-month threshing period. On most farms, then, harvest hands only slowly drifted away from the harvest, with occasional reports of them leaving as late as November or December.[45]

Figure 2. Image: Ellsworth Young, "Harvest Hands Are Scarce," Chickasha Daily Express *(Chickasa, OK), 8/16/1912, p. 1.*

All of this led to a sometimes stupendous demand for harvest workers. At the height of the harvest hand, farmers would meet incoming trains and hire hobos as they stepped off, shouting bids of higher and higher wages if they had to—a bizarre sight corroborated in several sources.[46] Women often engaged in the harvest, much to the perennial surprise of male newspaper writers. Frequently, however, the harvest was borderline absurd—indeed,

it is hard to parse where the line was between truth and hyperbole: farmers chasing down hobos with shotguns and press-ganging them into work crews; farmers locking men into a train and hiring armed guards to ensure they weren't hired at points in between; a salesperson stepping off the train, getting his hand shaken warmly by a dozen different men, before informing them he wasn't a harvest hand, and subsequently getting lynched; and an earthquake that turned out to be a stampede of farmers going to the nearest train.[47] One cartoon, reproduced above, depicts a farmer lassoing an unsuspecting passerby to force them into work.

Harvest hands could expect a very different reception in bad years, however. Many found themselves milling about an unfriendly town among the crowds, seeking work that simply did not exist. Some found themselves in this situation even when going to a pre-arranged job—even those given out by state employment agencies.[48] Itinerant workers who did not find work would end up, at best, sleeping in parks by the thousands alongside the local homeless population.[49] They were mostly "penniless," and "return[ed] to the east in a worse financial condition than they were before they came."[50] Most begged for food, having to go door to door, and were consequently cast as a menace to society.[51] In these cases, they could expect to find police waiting for them—indeed, waiting for the slightest signal of idleness.[52] One representative police chief, from Guthrie, Oklahoma, was quoted as saying, "A city is no place for harvest hands."[53] In short, the Great Plains was a place of wildly unpredictable work demands—and one where the desired laborer would be met with a handshake and a bidding war, and the surplus laborer would be met not just completely without a job—but with a policeman's billy club, to boot.

Hobos met these variable harvest demands with flexibility and dynamism. Their work is traceable not by any kind of systematic reporting of contracts or wages, but by their appearance in contemporary local papers. Newspapers on the Great Plains regularly reported on the arrival and departure of "harvest hands" along with "tramps" and "hobos;" they noted when farmers came into town looking for workers, when there were crowds of unemployed would-be harvest hands, and when there were none to be found. The resulting journalistic record traces not only the dynamics of hobo employment in the harvests, but how the effects of a good or bad harvest manifested directly in the lives of these workers.

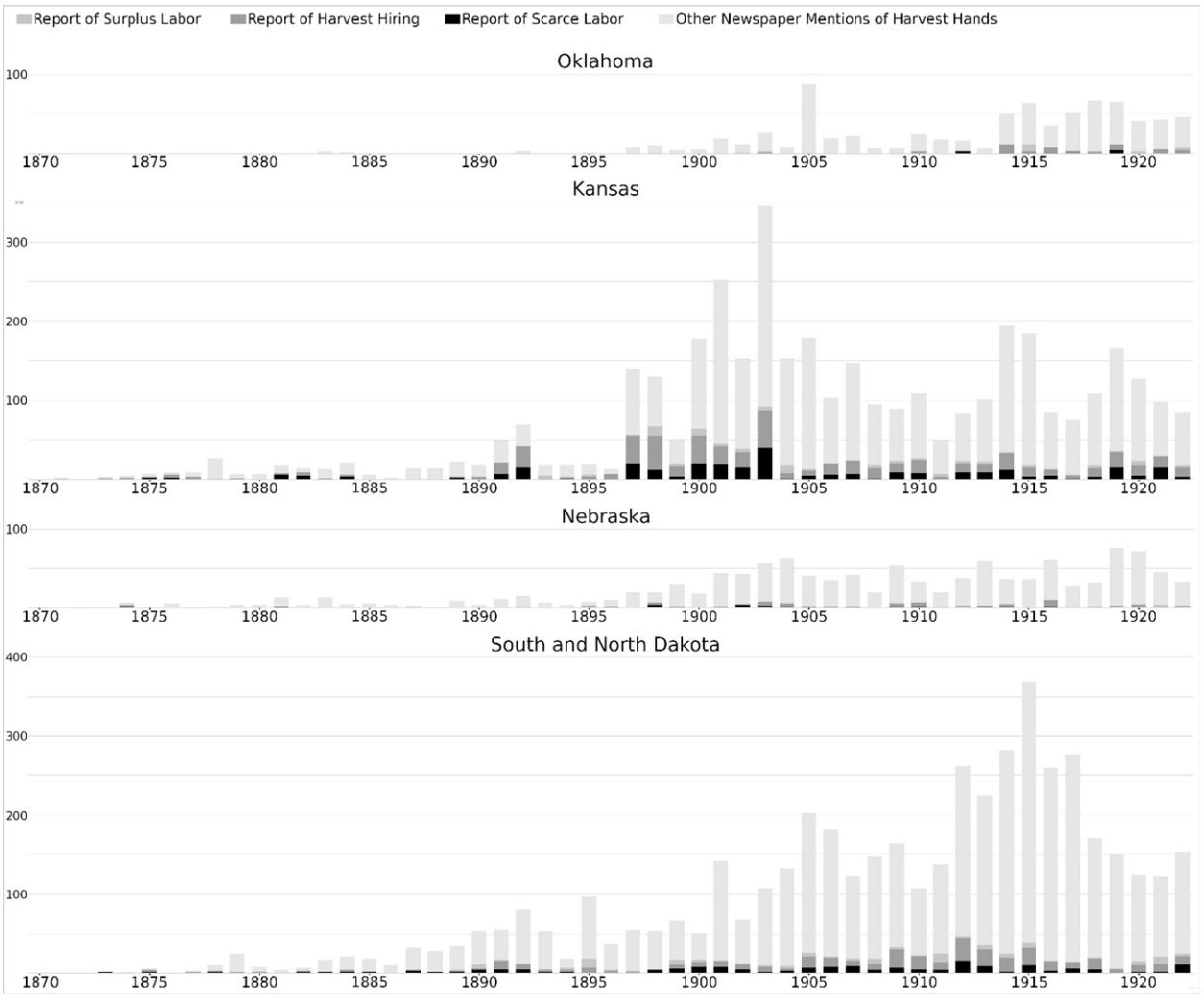

Figure 3. Chart: Reports of Harvest Hands by Year, 1870–1920. *Image by author.*[54]

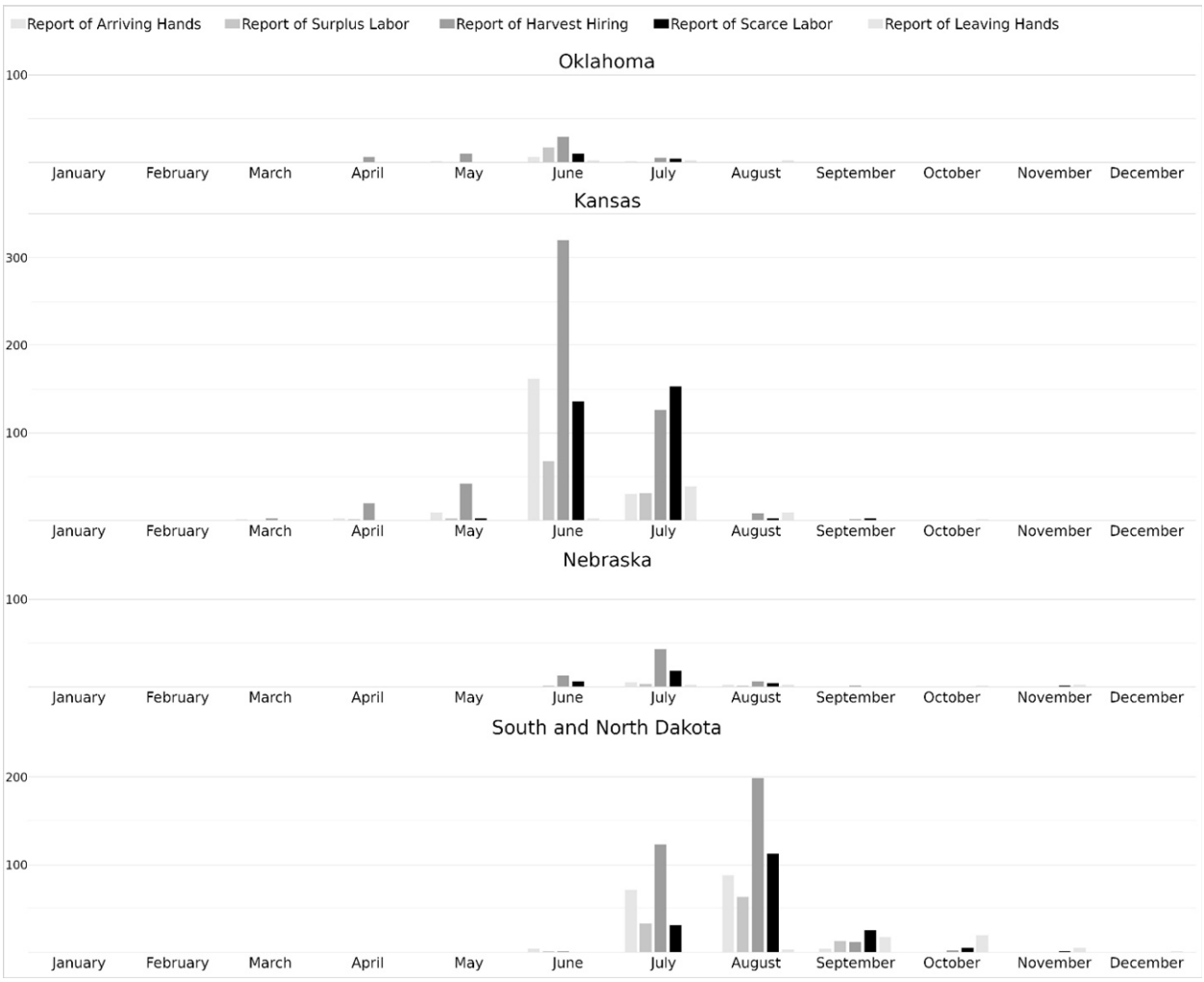

Figure 4. Chart: Reports of Harvest Hands by Month, 1870–1920. *Image by author.*[55]

These charts represent over ten thousand mentions of harvest hands in contemporary Great Plains newspapers—and immediately paint a highly suggestive portrait of harvest work. Even without knowing exact climatic data, we can pinpoint bad years. Droughts in the mid-1880s and mid-1890s are instantly visible, as job advertisements plummeted in with poor harvests. Regional droughts in the Northern Plains are visible in the early 1920s. Reports of surplus laborers milling about in town or looking for work ballooned in the worst years, and gave way to panic over labor scarcity in good years. Even a cursory reading, in other words, shows how profoundly precarious harvest work could be. But

though this is a tidy confirmation of climate precarity, much more can be gleaned from these reports.

First, it is useful to note when and how farmers hired, relative to their actual labor needs. In Kansas, the first hires always came long before the actual harvest, usually by May, sometimes in April, and once even in March. These job ads were posted well in advance of migrator workers, too, suggesting the most precocious farmers arranged for help from neighbors and those living in adjacent towns.[56] Farmers then inevitably supplemented these early arrangements immediately before or during the harvest, in June and July. Such summer hires happened during the arrival of the harvest hands themselves. Farther north, the same panic reigned. In Nebraska, early hires were rare, and virtually all hiring took place right as the harvest started. The Dakotas looked much like Kansas, but two months later—early hires in June and July, full blown harvest in August, and hands lingering on until December. In other words, employment was ad hoc and on demand; harvest hands arrived with no guarantee of a job, and farmers waited until the last possible moment to hire help.

Second, the timing of the reports of surplus or scarce labor are even more striking. Surplus and scarcity could not be predicted in advance, though many tried—actual reports of surplus and scarcity peaked with the harvest and the arrival of the harvest hand. Harvest hands arrived—and only then discovered there were not enough jobs. Other areas might discover there were not enough harvest hands, but it was already nearly too late. Hiring ads, scarcity, and surplus, all had their own rhythm depending on the year. Early arrangements for hiring came in before the crop conditions could even be remotely known. In a good year, job ads then accelerated, and scarcity gradually became apparent; in a bad year, they fell away and dwindled to nothing, alongside reports of surplus laborers. And even in some fairly

poor years, reports of labor scarcity could come from various points around the Plains—note how even the catastrophic 1894 harvest generated a report of labor scarcity—indicating how the climate could be inconsistent from place to place.[57] (Newspapers reports often noted this directly.[58]) In the worst cases, wheat was left uncut, or crowds of laborers stood around without work. Farmers surely suffered losses in these cases, but harvest hands might have stowed away on a train out to the West and earned not a cent in wages to show for it—betting not the farm, but their lives. It was the laborers who bore the brunt of difficult years.

Third, the timing of departing harvest hands carried a ragged, long tail. Though hobos (by necessity) usually arrived within a week of the harvest, they left in dribs and drabs over the succeeding months. Some left directly after the harvest, either to find new employment farther north with the ripening band of crops, or, surely, to return home, their wanderlust sated and a hundred dollars in their pockets. But stories about harvest hands on their return journey surface well past harvest time: up to four months after the crop was finished. These stragglers likely had stayed on with threshing crews—demonstrating lucky hobos could find work for the entire season.

To see how these patterns might play out in different years, let us focus on two successive harvests: those of 1892 and 1893. 1892, the last year before a multi-year drought, can be taken as indicative of how the hobo work regime might function in a good year; 1893 reveals its dark mirror—the system in a year when hobos weren't wanted at all. By juxtaposing newspaper accounts with climatic data and by tracing how hobos moved through these harvests and what kinds of work conditions they found, we can reveal the effects of climate on migrant workers.

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A Tale of Two Years

The key to the 1892 job market was atmospheric pressure. This was the story told by weather maps, released daily by the United States Department of Agriculture. Atmospheric lows passed west to east, squeezing the moisture out of the air; rain fell in gentle, repeated thunderstorms. Hail was rare. So, too, were floods. Instead, the wheat of the West soaked up the moisture greedily, growing tall and green. Farmers reported these crops to their local weather stations, who relayed the information by telegraph to the nation's capital along with information on rain, winds, and storms. In short: conditions were perfect, and everybody knew it.[59]

As it happened, these conditions continued to and through the harvest. Today, tree ring records show 1892 to be an unusually good year for the Great Plains in the midst of an awful decade—something farmers and meteorologists alike had very little reason to suspect. While 1890 had been a difficult harvest, particularly in the Dakotas, and farmers in the northern Plains had required food aid and state relief, 1891 had brought a record harvest across every state in the region.[60] 1892 brought even better conditions: not a single part of the entire Great Plains had anything but above-average rainfall.[61]

As early as February—five months before the harvest—Kansas farmers were anticipating huge returns; one local said "the rain raised the price of harvest hands 25 cents, and the snow 50 cents" more.[62] By the second week in March, farmers had started to inquire after local harvest hands—seeking city boys to contract to come out to take in their wheat. In the Twin Cities, employment agents were already recruiting for the Dakota harvests—five months in advance. Wages, both groups expected, would be the highest ever.[63] By May, it had become a low, bubbling panic: some rumors suggested farmers were paying $4 a day to

secure hands, an absolutely unprecedented rate.[64] (The grain markets of Chicago noticed, too—wheat prices slipped from about 90 cents per bushel at year's start to 80 cents by the time of the harvest.)[65] On May 31, the national weather service reported harvest was to begin in ten days' time.[66]

From there, the race was on. Farmers "filled" the streets of Kansas towns, seeking harvest hands, engaging them the moment they stepped off the train.[67] Wages topped out everywhere at more than $2 per day—though only $2 a week for the women who fed them.[68] Thousands flooded in from out of state, coming through Kansas City along the railways—but it still wasn't enough.[69] For the first time ever, the state negotiated a special "harvest excursion" rate with the railroads, securing rides for only a nominal fare (or none at all!) along all the major trunk lines, so long as a man was coming to work in the harvest field.[70] Railroads were hardly doing a kindness—rather, they saw the potential for thousands upon thousands of carloads of grain, one that would not be met if there were too few workers.[71] And despite the special rate, the usual hyperbole of farmers kidnapping potential hands, and reports of teachers, businessmen, and even circuit court judges setting aside their day jobs for much more lucrative work in the fields, it still looked to be not enough.[72] Seventy million bushels of wheat was the final tally: one for every citizen in the United States.[73] In the end, a reported 20,000 harvest hands came from outside the state to help the wheat crop, working from June through August, just barely bringing in the wheat before it spoiled.[74]

Almost as soon as the harvest ended in Kansas, it began in the Dakotas. Here, its fury was a little subdued—neither Dakota nor Minnesota had a record year like Kansas—but it was still well above the past few years' average.[75] Nor did it have to be record-breaking to strain the labor supply to its breaking point. With transients still tied up in Kansas threshing,

the call was put out for another 10,000 laborers in late July.[76] That number turned out to be conservative—by the time the harvest had begun, the Dakotas required something more like 40,000 migrants.[77] Hundreds of hands came in on every train, but never enough. Even when they were contracted to work at a specific destination, they rarely made it—instead being hired for more money at an earlier stop.[78] It was only in late August, just as the harvest was coming to a close, that it became evident crops wouldn't be lost.[79] The last few trickled into the West in September, following threshing work, and only departed in October, just ahead of the first snows.[80]

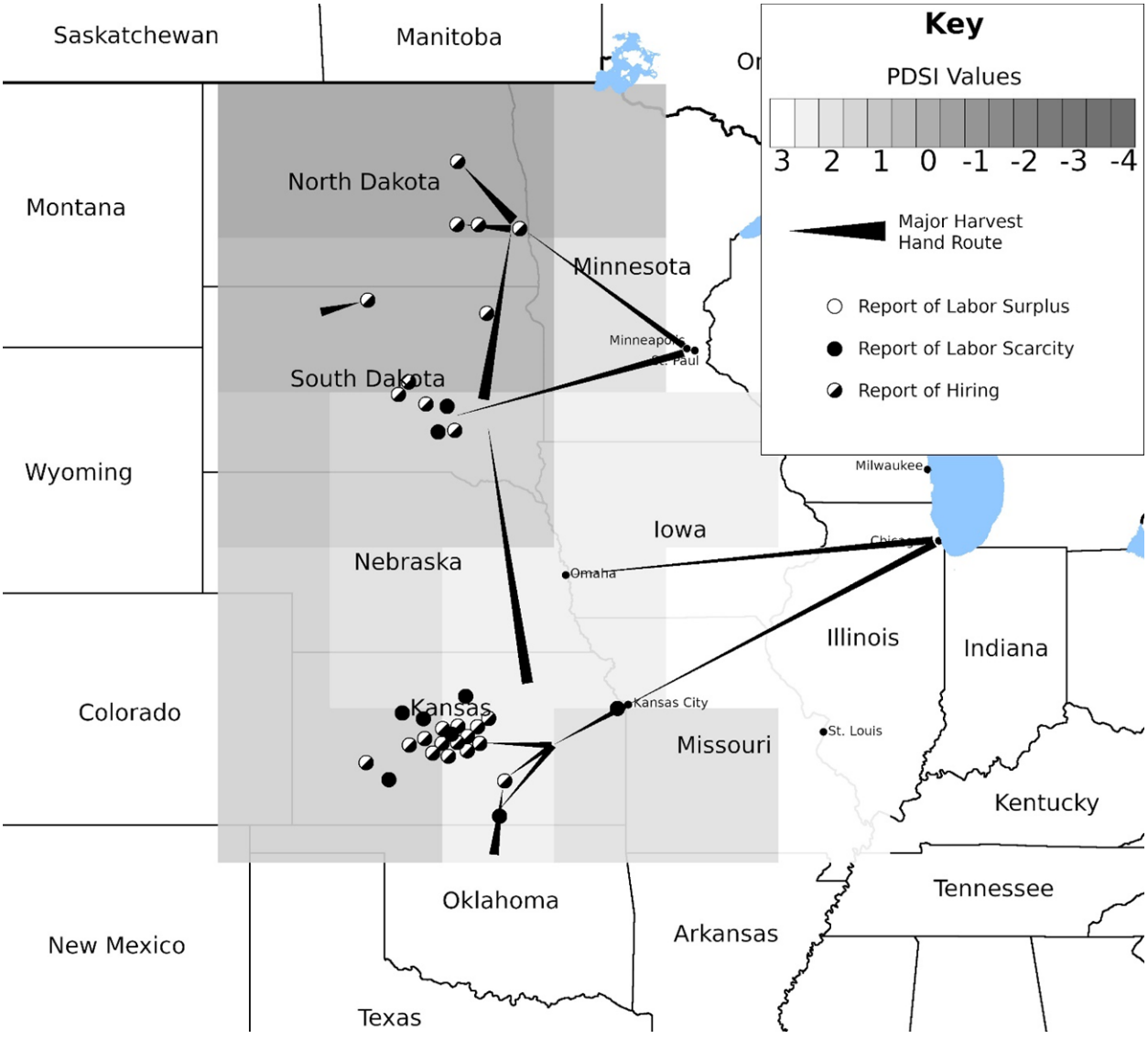

Figure 5. Map: The 1892 Harvest. *In this harvest, roughly 20,000 harvest hands were recruited from out of state to work in Kansas, and another 40,000 in North and South Dakota and the Red River Valley in Minnesota. Harvest hand travel routes have been inferred from reports of arriving harvest hands. Note that reduced railroad rates eased travel from Chicago to Kansas City and Omaha, and from the Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul) to North and South Dakota. A fairly large contingent of harvest hands from the local Indian Reservation are reported to have been recruited in nearby South Dakota. Image by author.*[81]

This was the hobo work regime in good times. Farmers found workers, worked alongside them, paid them high wages, fed them at their family dinner tables. Hobos found adventure, well-paying jobs, and a sense of purpose; they got to travel across the country and save up for their return home. A towering empire of grain, built on colonized land—every white man could share in this bounty, even if they didn't live on the grasslands. But the bounty was never guaranteed—something painfully illustrated the very next year.

After 1892, 1893 was a nightmare. It began, again, with the weather. This time, the atmospheric lows sweeping the nation somehow, studiously, avoided the Great Plains. On the occasions when they did bother to cross the prairies, they usually came from across the Rocky Mountains, having already dumped their rain on the western slopes, carrying nothing but wind to the east. A late September storm crossed the northern Plains, dropping some much-needed rain on the Red River Valley between Minnesota and the Dakotas, just before the harvest.[82] Otherwise, the skies were stubbornly blue. The weather maps are borne out by modern dendrochronology: all but the easternmost trees of the Great Plains show narrow rings for 1893—the result of constant high pressure systems, and very little rain.[83]

The enthusiasm we saw in 1892 Kansas for recruiting harvest hands had entirely evaporated. No one advised their neighbors to recruit harvest hands in February. No one did so in March, April, or May, either. By June, one of the few Kansas newspapers which bothered to mention harvest hands noted, "The farmers are this year pretty well supplied with harvest

hands, and it is thought that none will have to be imported from other localities."[84] We know, from a few other sources, *some* harvest hands had been hired, but absolutely nothing like Kansas's 20,000 in the previous year. In lieu of the earlier rushes to lasso hired help, the harvest hands were thicker than drunks "around a Missouri bar."[85] Some farmers, their own land desiccated, hired themselves out to others as harvest hands to make ends meet.[86]

The situation did not improve with latitude; the Dakotas, too, had suffered dearly. The first problem here was the price of wheat fell dramatically before the Dakota harvests.[87] Farmers alliances in counties around North and South Dakota agreed upon set wages, hoping to avoid a bidding war over the few harvest hands they would need.[88] Meanwhile, wheat prospects waned while harvest hands arrived in thickets—southern areas reported crowds of idle men.[89] Journalists tended to blame the men themselves, saying they refused to work for anything but high wages in times of hardship, but the sheer quantity of men coming into the state belied that theory.[90] A year after the Dakotas estimated they had been 40,000 laborers short, it seemed like every town had surplus workers—everywhere but the Red River Valley, where the late rain caused about a month of hiring and scarcity before the excess of workers crushed in.

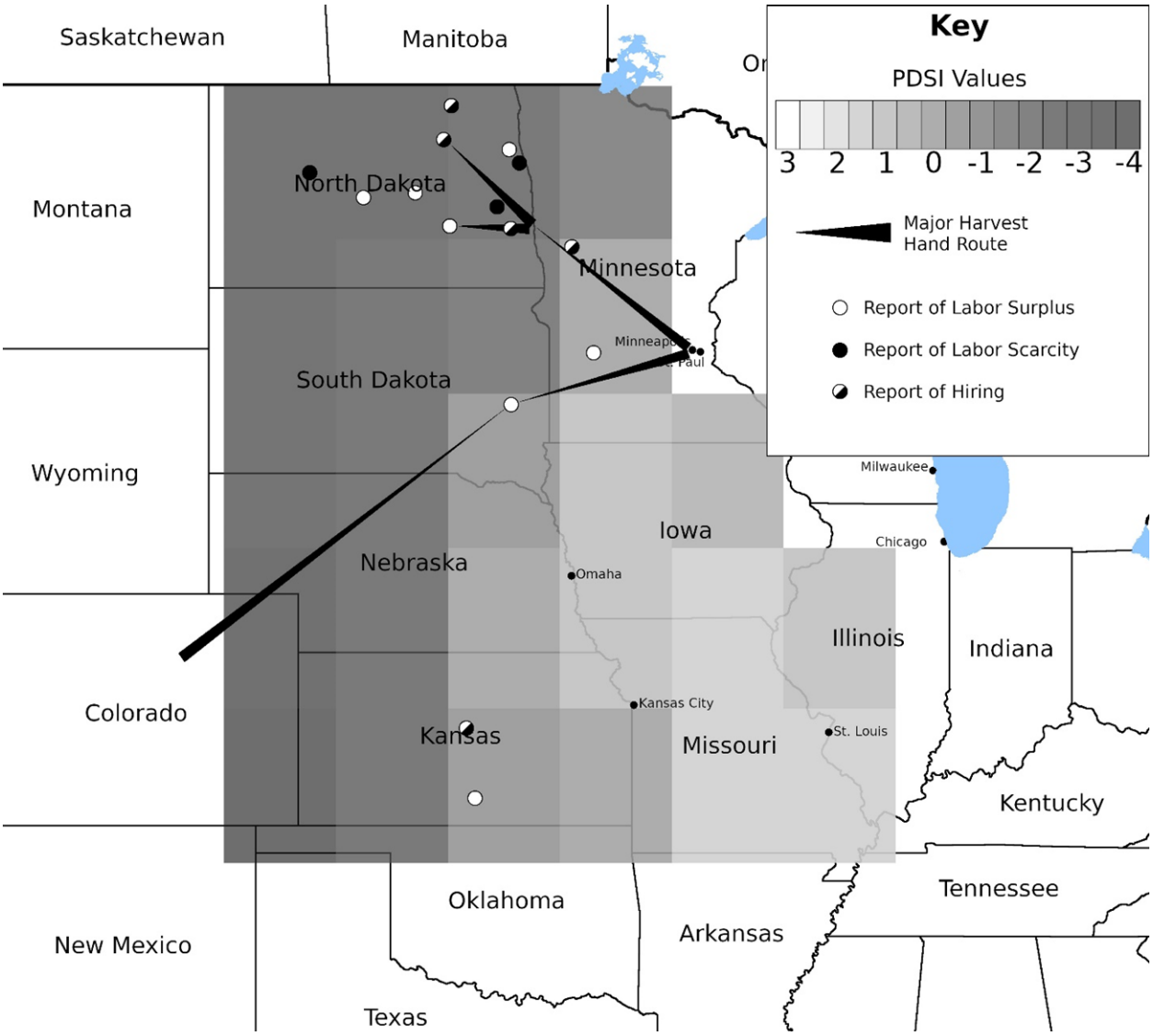

Figure 6. Map: The 1893 Harvest. *In this harvest, reports indicate few, if any, harvest hands were recruited from out of state in Kansas, and perhaps 2-5,000 for the Dakotas and Red River Valley of Minnesota, though contemporary accounts suggest many more would-be harvest hands actually came and waited for work that never materialized. Out-of-work miners from Colorado are reported to have come to the Dakotas, as well as various unemployed workers from Minneapolis/St. Paul. Image by author.*

The drought did not abate. Instead, it lingered on for half a decade; the 1890s became enshrined in Great Plains memory as the worst drought until the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.[91] Year after year, this manifested as surplus crowds of harvest hands across each of the Plains states. Compounding factors, of course, exacerbated conditions on the Great Plains. A global

depression, particularly acute in the United States, had led directly to the unemployment of a fair number of urbanites—some of whom undoubtedly sought work in the wheat fields and added to the surplus.[92] But the year-to-year correlation of climate on the one hand and labor surpluses and deficits extends well beyond the 1890s depression—in both directions. What contemporaries often blamed on the general economic situation was in fact a window into the material reality of their work. Without wheat to bring in, people accustomed to making ends meet by spending a summer at harvest hid around rural towns, waiting for work that never came.

Bizarrely, however, the 1890s drought—the same drought that ravaged the massive Great Plains wheat harvest—coincided with a *decline* in wheat prices. The products of hobo hands did not stay in the Great Plains, nor even in the United States. From the time the wheat frontier had crossed into the Ohio Valley onwards, the United States was a grain exporter.[93] Grain exports were comparable in value to the oft-studied cotton exports across most of the nineteenth century—and just as important to the global economy.[94] American grain fed growing American and European cities, propelling the Industrial Revolution with its surplus calories.[95] But the grain trade cut both ways: at the exact same time as settlers cultivated the American Great Plains, exploiting a settler colonial bounty of fertility to generate unheard of yields, the exact same things happened in settler colonies around the world. The Argentine Pampas became a major rival to the American Great Plains, as did the Russian steppe and the Australian Outback. Each of these grain-growing regions were predicated on the removal and extermination of Indigenous peoples, and each produced extraordinary wheat yields. The result, by the 1890s, was a glut of wheat in the market, such that prices crashed right along with the global economy.[96] As a result, the wheat distribution system continued,

insulating both consumers and investors from the drought. The commodity traders in Chicago lost little money in the matter, nor did the grain merchants with their towering elevators; farmers, by contrast, fell deeper into debt.[97]

Moreover, this production process was everywhere marred by excess. The inefficiency of distributing labor in the harvest was only one aspect of this. From there, wheat kernels were loaded into simple boxcars that imperfectly contained them, often in the open air. Wheat *literally leaked* out of the system, both in transit and at railyards.[98] Towering silos and grain elevators were built to reject imperfect grain; mills built to make it tastier by shedding once-valuable calories in the form of bran—though the rejected silage made its way into animal feed, it was still illustrative of a system built for surplus.[99] No one was concerned about famine. The global nature of grain—and its reliance on settler colonial bounties—meant the food *system* was virtually impervious to climatological shocks. Americans—and Europeans—did not starve due to a failure of grain in the Great Plains (though some farmers certainly lost their farms). Food production was built to insulate them from price and production signals; the only people who could starve were the Indigenous people whose land they had taken—and other victims of colonialism elsewhere, who the grain political economy quite intentionally routed around.[100]

The "tramp problem"—i.e., fears around homeless men in American cities—had first been raised in the 1870s, and was once more in the depression of the 1890s.[101] Contemporaries feared what unattached men with no visible means of support might do. The lack of a family, in their eyes, predisposed them to violence and drunkenness, opening men to an animalistic nature. Tramp life in particular was feared as a haven for homosexuality and non-normative behaviors, one that might draw in innocent children. Their rootlessness,

moreover, made them a threat to communities: no one knew them, meaning they could not be trusted. Communities viewed tramps as a source of crime. The migrant worker, in other words, was already an object of skepticism and concern.[102]

But early on, this dynamic was largely absent from the Kansas and Dakota wheat harvests. Though some lamented the class of people who came into their towns, the most frequent mention of harvest hands in local papers in the 1880s was hiring notices; "harvest hand" was even an affectionate nickname for newborn children in the decade.[103] The relative egalitarianism of the harvest followed from this logic. The Great Plains had been one of the few places where hobos were welcome. The surplus men and tight wallets of the drought years, however, appear to have changed this. Labor conditions grew more bitter. In the election years of 1892, 1894, and 1896, tramps became a fierce topic of debate, as the Populist party took a relatively lenient stance towards them. Most notably, the Populist governor of Kansas, Lewelling, instructed police not to arrest or drive off hobos. Employment agencies were established to get them jobs. The Populists' main rivals, the Republicans, blamed them for a supposed surge of tramp activity in the state.[104] This debate not only made hobos a point of contention—it served to turn public opinion against harvest hands much more broadly.

During and after the 1890s, suspicion of migrant workers grew alongside economic and environmental stressors. Accusations of murder began to surface in the 1890s, not just of migrants murdering other harvest hands, but of murdered regular citizens, farmers, and even farmers' children.[105] Petty theft and crime became near constant topics in the papers, with tramps robbing harvest hands on the train ride home frequently.[106] Harvest hands' cleanliness was constantly called into question, and state health officials, in classic

Progressive Era fashion, started to investigate them as sources of diseases, particularly those diseases viewed as urban and unhygienic, like cholera.[107] Fears of tramps conning innocent housewives proliferated wildly as well, with an obsessive concern rising that those begging for money were only *pretending* to go to the harvest field, and in fact refusing work altogether.[108] Fear for the family reflected the degree to which migrant workers relied on the kindness of women to eat and survive—but it also meant harvest hands, who had been part of the family meals before, were increasingly seen as a destabilizing force on idyllic family life. Generally, the tramp had become a blank slate, a synecdoche for social ills.

The consequences were severe—and not just for the more itinerant harvest hands. Scapegoating for crimes made more than a few harvest hands targets of extrajudicial and mob violence. Harvest hands were beaten, lynched, or thrown out of town—a pattern that was encouraged or actively aided by law enforcement (as it was in so many parts of the country).[109] But more broadly, work relations appear to have been severely strained through the 1890s, as striking and explicit labor conflict became common.

Did the drought alone cause these problems? Certainly not. The climate played a determinative but not all-encompassing role; as with the rise of the harvest hand, the increasing suspicion of the harvest hand was an emergent property arising from climatic conditions and the economic and penal systems around them. Still, the drought created a consistent, multiyear surplus of would-be harvest hands, and devastated farmers' livelihoods. Newspapers struggled to explain the surplus men as anything other than moral terms—as the laziness of those involved. The destruction of multiple harvests made it difficult to pay harvest hands a living wage, leading to increasing antagonism—antagonism we shall now turn to. The drought was a fundamental pivot point; it lived on in farmers'

memories, as did the new perception of the harvest hand as fundamentally immoral. The legacy in the labor relations between harvest hands and their employers proved lasting.

The hobo, then, was treated with the same carelessness as the excess grain—allowed to spill out of train cars and rot in the rail yards. The beneficence of the railroad companies in encouraging harvest hands to come out—something they had a monetary stake in—was rarely matched on the way back. "When men were needed for harvest work the police and the railroad authorities did not disturb them much, when stealing illegal rides on the trains. But once the grain was gathered in and threshed, and the hordes of workers were returning to the cities, things were very different!" reminisced Charles Ashleigh of his harvest hand days. Police turfed hobos from cars, criminals shot and beat them for their earnings—and on top of all that, farmers increasingly saw hobos as employees and adversaries rather than as friendly faces at the dinner table. "The hoboes themselves are the victims of the law; it does not protect them. Who can condemn them then, if they themselves administer the code of the road upon those who would deprive them of their earnings?"[110]

*** *** ***

New Ways (Hobos and the Harvest in the Twentieth Century)

I had a job once threshing wheat,
Worked sixteen hours with hands and feet.
And when the moon was shining bright,
They kept me working all the night.
One moonlit night, I hate to tell,
I 'accidentally' slipped and fell.
My pitchfork went right in between,
Some cog wheels of that thresh-machine.

Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!
It made a noise that way,
And wheels and bolts and hay,
Went flying every way.
That stingy rube said, 'Well!

A thousand gone to hell.'
But I did sleep that night,
I needed it all right.

So ran Joe Hill's version of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," a labor anthem he wrote in the 1910s to the tune of the popular song.[111] Hill was a "Wobbly," an activist of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). This "One Big Union," in direct contrast to its rivals and eventual slayers, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, sought to organize workers from every industry into one big union, then call a general strike and bring down capitalism in one fell swoop.[112] They were also the only major national union that made a serious or concerted effort to bring hobos into their labor union, seeing an opportunity to organize the increasingly exploited and underpaid harvest hands in the fields of the Great Plains, and so control the grain supply of the nation.[113] The Wobblies sought to accomplish this aim both through recruiting harvest hands on trains, in jungles, in towns, by water tanks, and in the wheat fields, and through sabotaging harvest machinery, breaking or blowing up reapers, threshers, and a variety of other farm equipment.[114] Collectively, after the climate, unions in the 1910s became perhaps the second biggest fear of the wheat farmer.

Unionization undercut the ability of the farmer to dictate wages. It threatened the flexibility that had made the hobo work regime so valuable for wheat agriculture. Farmers could—and did—continue to trade their own labor through the next few decades, but such labor was usually not enough to bring in the entire wheat crop, as the continued employment of harvest hands even in bad years attests to. Therefore, while the difficult 1890s had politicized the tramp and turned the harvest field into an ideological battlefield, the unionization of the 1900s and 1910s turned the harvest field into a literal battlefield. The climate still dictated labor conditions to a great degree. Now, however, climatological and

economic stress had made a permanent change. The bidding wars of good years were marked by strikes; the starving, idle crowds of bad years by deadly crackdowns.

First, let us take two more case studies from before the arrival of the Wobblies to establish how the same climatic dynamics interacted with new wrinkles in labor relations. The two harvests I examine here—1903 and 1904—are very different from 1892 and 1893. The earlier years represent perhaps the most remarkable contrast between two years in the history of American settlement on the Great Plains—a bumper crop in 1892 versus one of the most catastrophic droughts in the region's history in 1893. 1903 and 1904, by contrast, are chosen because they were not extraordinary at all. Instead, they illustrate the ordinariness of the climatic stress I explore here—and the ordinariness of the hobo work regime's response.

In retrospect as well as at the time, the climatic data for 1903 indicated a marvelous year for wheat crops. Rain fell plentifully across the spring and summer, and farmers began to reach out for harvest hands—and worry about a shortage—by mid-April.[115] The main drama in the wheat belt came not from the weather, but from politics. Rumors circulated that farm hands had talked of a national union—not just of the estimated hundred thousand harvest hands, but the five million regular farmworkers in every industry.[116] Farmers hoped to counteract this in some places by forming "trusts" of their own, offering a fixed wage across counties (as they already had in earlier years).[117] T. B. Gerow, a Kansas public employment bureau agent, produced an initial estimate in April of 10,000 hands needed from outside Kansas—a fairly low figure. David Blaine, a quixotic crusader whose principal aim in life appeared to be taking Gerow to task over his harvest hand estimates, more than doubled that with 25,000.[118] Over the next month, the estimates of both men gradually

climbed, reaching 25,000 and 30,000 by harvest.[119] Farmers and journalists treated it rather like a horse race, reporting on the figures without too much seriousness; as one put it, "It's 30,000 extra harvest hands against the Hessian fly, drought, et al. Who'll be the victor?"[120] In reality, everyone expected a mad rush on harvest hands, one even reduced railroad rates could not sate.[121]

This proved to be the case. Rains fed the crop well, and by late June, harvest hand shortages were reported all across southern Kansas, creeping into the center of the state by July, and reaching into Nebraska. Through it all, Gerow and Blaine alike raised their estimates over and over again, finally settling on roughly 30,000 being necessary. Gerow's public employment agency filled some 3,900 jobs with men out of Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita, taking in harvest hands from the eastern states and ferrying them to points farther south and west.[122] The other twenty thousand hands came from migrants who preferred to deal with farmers directly—and they had no trouble with this. Farmers stopped trains to hire hands, turned to their wives and daughters for extra labor, and so on—all the hallmarks of a successful Kansas harvest.

Almost immediately after the close of the Kansas harvests, the Dakotas began to bring in their wheat. Working their way up from Kansas, or arriving fresh from the rest of the Northwest, through Minneapolis and Saint Paul and up to Fargo and Grand Forks, and from there into the countryside. As was the custom, harvest hands traveling in groups received reductions on their travel costs.[123] But farmers feared an acute scarcity of harvest hands, as lampooned in the newspaper cartoon below; the main source of this was new regulations by the railroads to kick off free riders.[124]

Figure 7. Image: Cartoon Satirizing the Harvest Hand Recruitment Process. *"Rain in South Dakota,"* Evening Times-Republican *(Marshalltown, IA), 8/4/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85049554/1903-08-04/ed-1/seq-1/.*

Here, too, the worries proved unfounded. A brief, troubling report came out of South Dakota, where "harvest hands have also suffered, for they could not work on rainy days, and were forced to lay around idle much of the time when they had expected to be earning good wages," but this was an isolated incident.[125] For the most part, harvest hands streamed into the Dakotas and eventually into Manitoba, brought in the wheat harvest quickly, and reports of scarcity were rare. Reports of crime were not. Newspapers lauded the civility and good

behavior of the harvest hands—but as one paper argued, "credit belongs not so much to the men as to the vigilance of the police."[126] Elsewhere in the Dakotas, the harvest came with murders and robberies; criminals always arrived with the harvest hand.[127] The ubiquity of such reports marked a clear shift in the perception of harvest hands from the decade before.

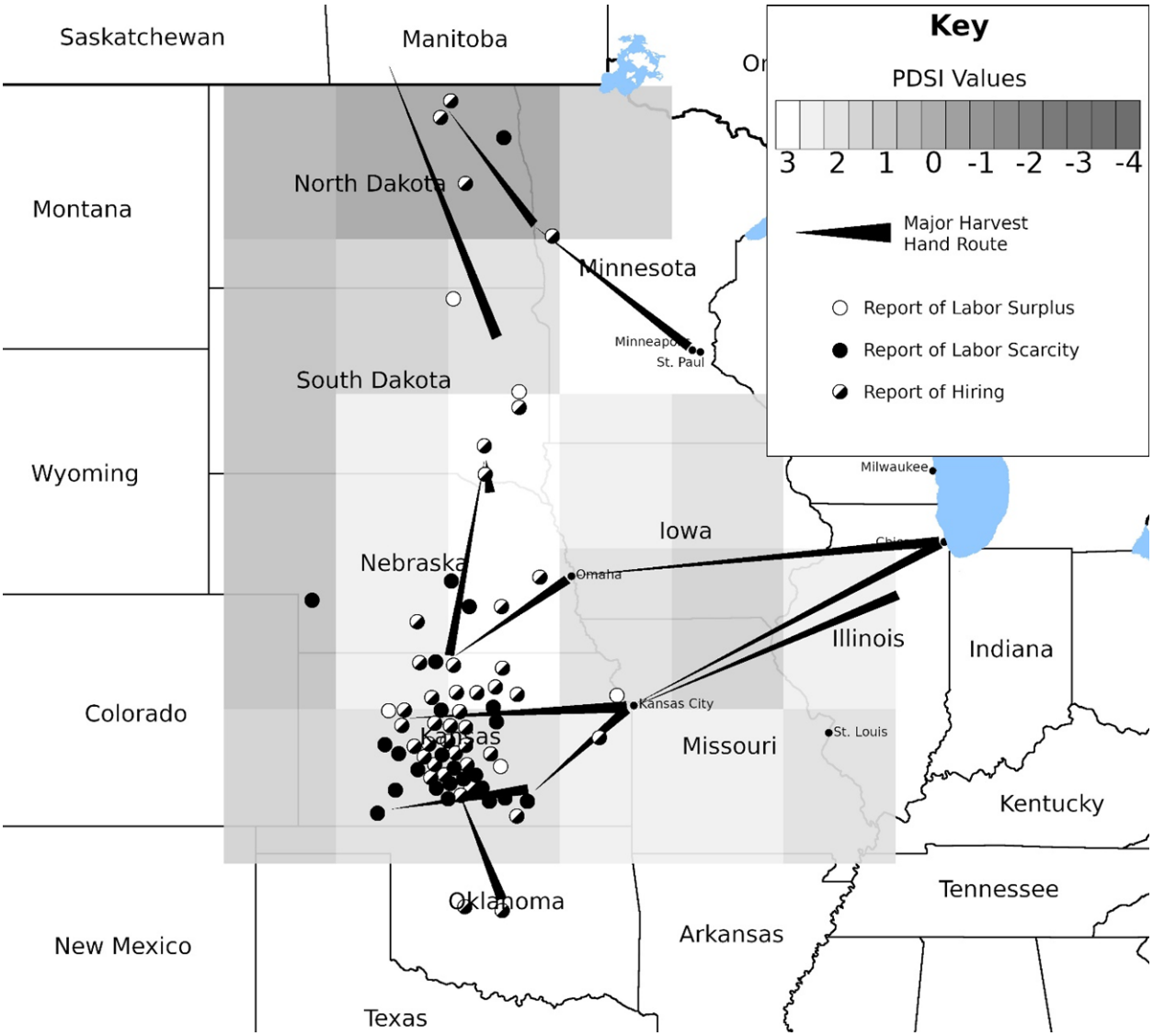

Figure 8. Map: The 1903 Harvest. *Newspapers indicate in this year, 30,000 harvest hands were employed in Kansas, perhaps 17,000 in the Northwest, and 20,000 more in Manitoba, in Canada. Image by author.*

Despite the overall success, the annual scramble to gather hands appeared to have worn thin: state free employment promised each other to cooperate for the 1904 harvest,

sharing workers and directing them to avoid any panic or crop loss.[128] Altogether, they estimated the Plains states would require at least 45,000 migrant workers to harvest their fields between them.[129] This news mingled with another spring of fairly good weather reports—indeed, 1904 climate data is remarkably similar to that of 1903 in the aggregate. No drought was reported. On this basis, one early bird farmer wrote to T. B. Gerow, requesting 1,500 hands for his county three months before the harvest—something that invited incredulity from others: "[This man] has the kind of faith that moves mountains."[130] Others urged would-be harvest hands "not to start west until the residents of this section have completed their negotiations with the chinch bugs, the rust and the weather."[131] It proved to be a prescient warning.

In June, persistent rains afflicted Kansas wheat, swamping fields, oversaturating soil, and delaying the harvest.[132] At the same time, unemployment rates in the rest of the country soared, leading many job-seekers into the state, hoping to make enough to live on in the harvest.[133] The rain seemed like a minor event, but it proved catastrophic. The failure of crops in any one area snowballed into the next; the harvest hands kept coming, and one observer reported "this country has been over-run."[134] Hundreds of "anxious" men pleading for work were reported in the larger towns; Kansas City's papers reported the city was "uncomfortably crowded with harvest hands without transportation."[135] Towns responded in a predictable way: making the harvest hands out to be a criminal element, sentencing them to hard labor on the rock pile, or driving them out.[136] Out-of-work hands took up refuge wherever they could, including a vast jungle on a river near Salina, a haven for hundreds of unemployed Black laborers.[137] Others responded with a tactic still new to the area: organizing in little unions, refusing to take low wages, and demanding the standard rates.[138]

Kansas railroads, towns, and fields all swarmed with too many men—a problem all the more striking because of its absence in the north.

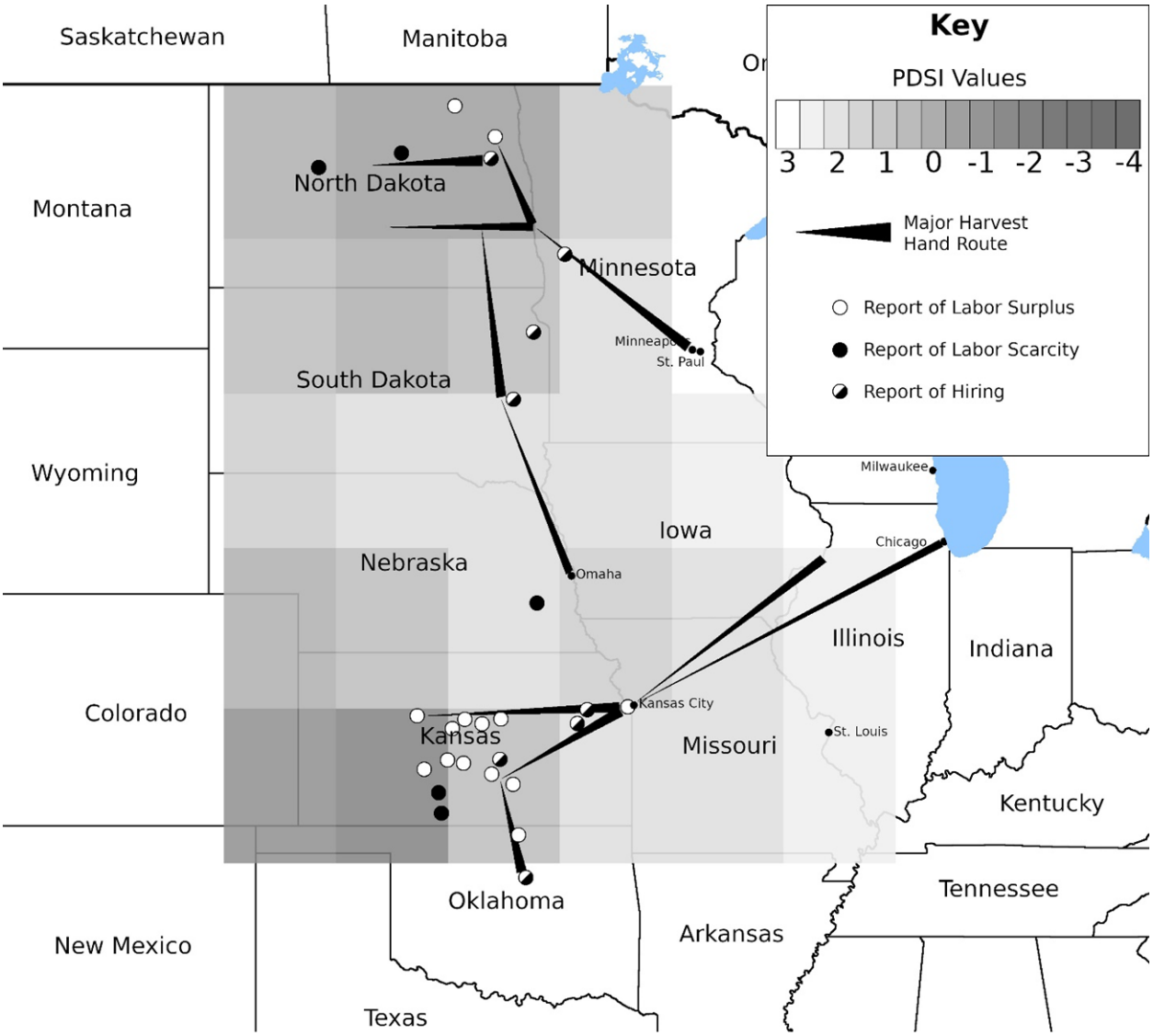

Figure 9. Map: The 1904 Harvest. *Newspapers indicate in this year, 20,000 harvest hands were employed in Kansas, perhaps as many as 40,000 in the Northwest, and 15,000 more in Manitoba, in Canada. Image by author.*

As we can see in the above map, while *some* reports of surplus laborers came out of the Dakotas, these were far fewer than the Kansas harvest—indeed, the ratio looks nearly identical to that of the 1903 harvest. Where Kansas estimated it would require 10,000 fewer laborers than the year before, the northwest (Minnesota and the two Dakotas) required

roughly the same amount: 40,000 across the three states.[139] This regional disparity is vital to understanding the Great Plains. Without it, we might be tempted to conclude the surge of surplus laborers in 1904 came out of rising national unemployment driving surplus workers from the city into the countryside. This was assuredly a factor—but the Dakota harvests absorbed this surplus without any trouble. The deciding factor here was the late-breaking rains that delayed and depressed the Kansas harvest—something that had not struck the Dakotas at all.

This was the harvest as it stood in the 1900s. By and large, climate still governed the region's work dynamics: a good harvest meant plenty of employment; a bad one, idleness. But some things had changed: state and later federal governments hoped to organize the distribution of harvest hands to make things a little less chaotic; meanwhile, the association of crime with harvest hands had certainly escalated. Worse, from the harvest hand's point of view, was that conditions of work, sleep, and eating had slowly but steadily deteriorated. Hands remarked frequently in personal accounts that their food varied wildly depending on who they worked for, and could sometimes be borderline inedible, while sleeping conditions were hardly consistent from workplace to workplace.[140] Farmers, on the other hand, remarked they desired to keep familiar faces around, but couldn't.[141] Relations between the two, consequently, deteriorated. In other words, the harvest hand had become just another employee.

Starting in the 1910s, the IWW—particularly its Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (no. 400)—sought to fight back against falling wages and difficult working conditions. But organizers met stiff resistance from farmowners, government officials at the state and federal level, and hobos and itinerant workers themselves—not to mention the difficulties

they met in organizing an itinerant labor force to begin with. Since farmers engaged harvest hands on an inconsistent and ad hoc basis, organizers found it difficult to predict who might be in the harvest fields for consecutive years, let alone who would be receptive to union action.[142] This meant that, over and over again, organizers had to start from scratch, trying to build unions repeatedly among workers with little collective memory of the struggles the years before.[143]

Nevertheless, they made enormous strides. Going into fields, sleeping and working and eating alongside workers, the Wobblies mobilized strikes seemingly every year.[144] Between roughly 1908 and 1921, the IWW consistently advocated for higher wages, longer contracts, and better treatments—and became a serious thorn in farmowners' sides—particularly in the Dakotas, where friendly farmers in the Non-Partisan League and Socialist Party helped make them strong.[145] Sabotage became a major fear for hostile farmers, with workers promising "an unfair day's work for an unfair day's wage."[146] At the height of these efforts, farmers were wont to see Wobbly plots in every mundane misfortune, with one Dakotan blaming the Wobblies for his car not starting.[147] Other reports told of Wobbly organizers beating or murdering harvest hands who simply wanted a job; they read of phosphorous bombs thrown by IWW hands; they read of trains captured and constant suspicious activity.[148] All of this, they might read, came despite valiant efforts by charitable organizations like the American Legion—and farmers themselves—to better working conditions.[149] Yet the Wobblies addressed very real problems, and as a result, they were enormously popular among harvest hands, and even among some of the sedentary population.[150] Even in 1921—years after the union's peak!—a survey by sociologist Nels Anderson found a little under a quarter (74) of the 400 hobos he interviewed belonged to

the union, and 43 more held favorable opinions of it.[151] But in response to them, community elites fought back—hard.

State action to defang and crush union activity saturated the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anti-vagrancy laws gave police a vague enough reason to arbitrarily arrest virtually anyone—something they routinely deployed against Wobblies agitating on the streets.[152] Crowds of harvest hands gathered in 1914 to hear IWW speakers in Aberdeen, South Dakota, including Joseph Carey, Katy Solomon, Jane Kaufman—the latter earning the titles of "queen of the hobos" and "Agitator of the first rank"—each of them arrested in turn.[153] Newspapers eagerly noted the lawlessness of IWW speakers, quoting Carey as responding to a threat of arrest: "Oh, I won't mind that… I've been arrested lots of times."[154] (The speakers were eventually released, as the police sought to appease a crowd of sympathetic harvest hands who had gathered around the prison.[155]) Similar events followed in 1915 and 1916. Against the largest gatherings, town police invited vigilante groups and militias to imprison or drive away harvest hands even *suspected* of belonging to the union—or simply attacking every harvest hand present.[156] In one incident, a Kansas county sheriff deputized fifty volunteer civilians to help imprison and fight union members.[157] In the most notorious incident—the "Battle of Mitchell," five hundred vigilantes clashed with an equally large crowd sympathetic to the IWW.[158] Nor were the IWW's efforts mere melodrama—they successfully raised harvest hand wages to $4 a day in several Dakota areas after years of refusals by farming leagues.[159] These actions climaxed in World War One, when the full force of the federal government came down on organizers across the country (see below).

Nor did Wobbly organizers have universal popularity among harvest hands. Some, undoubtedly, feared reprisal for belonging to the union, and others likely found the very idea

of it distasteful. For many, the rhetorical divide between "tramps" and "harvest hands" likely gave them pause in joining what was a radical organization—pride and a desire to feel like part of respectable society. Journalists routinely described—and perhaps fantasized about—workers fighting back against the IWW, usually with fists, but occasionally with murder.[160] Controversially, Wobblies installed an "eight hundred mile picket line" during harvest hand strikes, throwing non-members from trains (thus both enforcing the strike and putting harvest hands under protection of the union from rampant railroad crime).[161] Workers, when actually interviewed, sometimes described the IWW as "powerless to help the labor situation," said it did "more harm than good," and harbored suspicions about labor leaders having "been sold out."[162] Others might join the IWW without enthusiasm, purely to "get along better in the harvest."[163] Still others held the union in reverence—convinced the IWW was destined to "save society."[164] In light of all these difficulties, it is perhaps unsurprising Wobbly membership likely fluctuated wildly with the seasons, surging by tens of thousands in the summer harvest and fading in winter.[165]

Industrial action emerged from the fact that twentieth century farming grew ever more mechanized, and by some metrics, industrialized. New reaper and combine harvester designs sought—very explicitly—to remove the harvest hand from the work of harvesting.[166] Self-binding harvesters were often cited by harvest hands, IWW activists, and farmers alike as a major innovation that removed the most skilled and labor-intensive parts of harvest work. The result, as a Wobbly historian wrote, was that, "In the most developed regions the same relations prevail upon the farms as are found in the other industries, with the exception that the work is largely seasonal and therefore the employment is irregular and precarious."[167] The gulf between worker and farm-owner (or -renter) manifested in

many ways, some merely aspirational and some in living conditions. Kansas boosters had always claimed the incoming harvest hands might be so enraptured with the state that they could settle down an own a farm of their own, but "The price of farm land and the cost of farm equipment has advanced to such a figure that the farm wage worker… has a remarkably slim chance to become a farmer on his own account."[168] Workers described deteriorating conditions: being denied food, forced to sleep in haystacks while animals slept in the barn, of catching lice and cholera, and dying of blood infections.[169] And of course, the work was monotonous, repetitive, and back-breaking; the efforts of each man in these "highly capitalized wheat ranches… keyed up by the fact that he was a cog in an organized apparatus of men and machinery." It was, as one hobo described it, "killing work."[170]

Through it all, the migrant population of harvest hands only grew. Where harvests of the 1890s and 1900s might require anywhere from 15,000 to 60,000 hands from other regions, depending on the crop conditions, harvests of the late 1910s and early 1920s could require over 100,000 migrant workers.[171] While in other regions the number of farm laborers had started to decline, arresting the growth of a would-be rural proletariat, this was not the case in the Great Plains. Rather, the increasing automation seemed—for the most part—to be balanced out by other factors, like increasing acreage, threshing requirements, or the steady emigration of farmers' children from the region.[172]

The harvest influx—and a Progressive Era faith in the ability of governments to rationalize economies through regulation and moral governance—put enormous pressure on states to help farmers secure reliable harvest help.[173] Each of the Plains states set up state-level employment agencies, with offices in major cities both in and nearby their own states. These efforts commanded near-universal respect from farmers, who noted they were both

extremely capable of recruiting the vast numbers of harvest hands, but also that they responded swiftly and effectively to the sudden, unpredictable climate—one report on the 1902 harvest noted extremely late-breaking May rains had saved the crops, requiring the state employment agents in Kansas to scramble to fill 6,000 hands in less than a month.[174] The system was not perfect—as it had been before the advent of the agencies, harvest hands promised for one area sometimes stopped early. But the work was valued nevertheless.

Meanwhile, industrialization and state efforts to ensure the labor supply also laid bare one of the more hidden labor forms involved in the harvest: cooking. Job ads occasionally mentioned wanting women as cooks and cleaners alongside harvest hands, and complaints occasionally surfaced about their undercompensation compared to men for the same number of hours. But increasingly centralized distribution by employment agencies revealed the scale of this labor. In years where the full statistics were publicized, calls for women to serve as harvest cooks made up around 2-3 percent of the total—1,040 of the 35,000 laborers in 1915 Kansas and 244 of the 10,456 in 1916 North Dakota.[175] Likely the number of cooks needed from out of state increased as time went on, especially as farming grew more industrial and professional. In practice, it meant women joined the migrant labor force in large numbers as well. Those women who fed harvest hands on their family farms found themselves increasingly helped—or perhaps buffeted—by advice and advertisements exhorting them to keep harvest hands happy with everything from canned meat to fried food.[176] Kitchens on farms were built larger, to accommodate harvest cooking.[177] Like all parts of the migrant work regime, cooking had grown increasingly industrial.

Though the harvest hand work regime operated well through both bad and good years, the First World War seriously challenged it—not merely because of the strain it put

on the workforce, but because it showed another world was possible. Millions of young men enlisted, and where turn of the century labor requirements averaged about 25,000 migrant workers in Kansas fields and a roughly equal number in the Dakotas, and the 1910s had largely required influxes of about 15,000–50,000 men, the requirements for the Kansas wheat fields *alone* in 1918 reached around 90,000 men, with 50,000 more in the Dakotas.[178] The by now normal methods of recruiting some through the state employment agencies and filling the rest with harvest hands who drifted into town could not fill this need even under normal circumstances. Compounding this, the federal government had nationalized the railroads and placed them under considerably tighter security, preventing hobos from boarding and using trains as easily.

Government and non-governmental actors suggested various stopgap solutions for the shortages. Some proposed to bring in Chinese migrant workers to staff the fields, estimating 50,000 could easily be obtained in time.[179] Others suggested taking soldiers from the military bases in Kansas to labor in the fields.[180] In the Dakotas, the state Secretary of Agriculture endorsed a proposal to enlist men in the army to serve solely in the harvest.[181] Ultimately, these more unusual suggestions were discarded, but the end result was no less radical: extensive government intervention into every part of the labor supply chain.

This intervention took place at regional and national levels: the federal government centralized state employment offices' efforts, and secured rides for harvest workers through the railroads.[182] A Joint Farm Labor Committee standardized wages at $35–40 per month, allowed working boys and working women (the latter only on their families' own fields, indicating that flexibility was not limitless).[183] The key initiative was a vast network of public-private partnerships, with the government meeting with telephone companies to

make communication free and easy, working with various recruitment organizations on the ground, and posting and recruiting in a panoply of businesses: stores, groceries, furniture outlets, hardware stores, bakeries, and pool halls.[184] Government intervention here was considered vital, not just to stave off the apparently awful prospect of Black labor from the South or tramp labor from cities, but also as a matter of patriotism.[185] Indeed, jingoism saturated the harvest. "The fighters can't eat the liberty bonds and Red Cross subscriptions," exhorted one journalist; another exclaimed the "Binder Reel Is Humming Battle Hymn of Democracy."[186]

But one side effect of all this jingoism was that the government did not hesitate to utterly crush anyone who stood in the way of the harvest—in this case, the IWW. In the war years, especially in 1917–1918, the government arrested those union members who attempted to organize harvest hands or agitate for better working conditions. These efforts escalated in 1917, when the imprisonment of IWW organizers in Bisbee, Arizona, spurred nationwide strikes—and a threat to turn it general. Among harvest hands, these efforts once again centered in the Dakotas, as organizers paralyzed several wheat belt towns.[187] Lobbying by various industries, coupled with a suspicion that the IWW pursued an antiwar agenda, finally led to the federal government cracking down on the IWW in September of 1917, the "Big Pinch," arresting hundreds of members, raiding local chapters and seizing materials, records, and money nationwide.[188] Labor campaigns essentially disappeared during the war, and only gradually resurfaced in the years after the war.[189]

By and large, the system worked—it even worked a little *too* well. The region had no trouble bringing in the crop of 1918 and feeding the Entente. The state appeared to have ironed out vast inefficiencies in the labor system, such that in the lead up to the 1919 harvest

season, well after the war, farmers suggested imitating its most successful practices: inter-state cooperation, standardized wages, and careful distribution of harvest hands.[190] "The hit and miss travel of the harvest hands always looking for a higher wage which was being paid somewhere a litter [*sic.*] farther on, was largely eliminated in 1918."[191]

But farming on the Great Plains would not be so heavily regulated by the federal government for another decade. Farmers in the West were a progressive lot.[192] So, by and large, were the hands. But even if the various constituencies might applaud wartime arrangements continuing, the government itself expressed no intention of doing so. The idea of using the state to simplify the scramble for harvest hands faded away, leaving little impact on the system. The same madcap, piecemeal labor arrangements would continue, right up until new harvest technologies brought about the end of the hobo in the 1920s and 1930s.

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Conclusion

The bulk of the United States' conquest of the Great Plains took less than thirty years: from the Great Sioux War in the 1860s to the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, a figure made more astonishing for the fact that the region—and others like it—had successfully resisted European incursions for hundreds of years before. From the American prairies to the Eurasian steppe, sedentary agricultural societies have rarely managed to take and hold substantial parts of the semi-arid grasslands on their borders. The resistance of mobile, pastoralist cultures was truly remarkable.[193] Yet between 1800 and 1900, grassland regions in the United States and Canada, Argentina, Australia, Russia, and China were everywhere incorporated into colonial empires and integrated into capitalist commodity networks, with settler regimes committing genocide against Indigenous inhabitants to install a new political

economy, based on wheat and beef agricultural production.[194] And despite three millennia of precedent, this *worked.*

There are numerous factors that explain the newfound success of empire in temperate grasslands: technology (railroads and plows), demographics (rising populations), and settler colonial ideology (extermination and expropriation) all prominent among them.[195] But as the American case here makes clear, this is in significant part a labor story, too. The sheer climatic variability of a semiarid grassland was difficult for contemporaries to fathom, and as numerous scholars of the American West have noted, the settlement on the frontier "pulsed," like an arhythmic heartbeat, advancing and retreating with wet and dry periods.[196] Droughts could reverse years of building on the advancing edge of American Empire. Yet while this encouraged low population densities and rapid turnover of farming populations, the wheat harvest never let a crop rot in the field. Harvest hands—hobos—created an incredibly scalable labor system.

There can be little doubt that harvest work took the bodies of those who did it and broke them. Reaping, stacking, and threshing all relied on human and animal muscles from start to finish; only in threshing and the transportation of grain did steam power come anywhere near the production of wheat. The short-term demand for muscles in the harvest, a capitalist drive towards profit, and, above all, the unpredictably variable climate specific to the Great Plains, all combined to produce a labor system that relied on ad hoc, precarious workers. Other systems were possible; the migrant work regime was not even one plutocrats, politicians, or large landowners introduced deliberately. Rather, it was an emergent property of the many pieces of the Great Plains wheat harvest. It relied on the travel and destruction of poor bodies, with a never-fulfilled promise that those who worked

at it might earn enough to own farms of their own. And when the tractor came, they would be discarded once again.

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[1] Brown, *"Broke,"* xii.

[2] Brown, *"Broke,"* 75.

[3] Brown, *"Broke,"* 71–5.

[4] Brown, *"Broke,"* 71.

[5] An "emergent property" in science or philosophy is one which arises out of the interactions between parts of a system—that is, one in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

[6] Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor.*

[7] Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name.*

[8] McWilliams, *Ill Fares the Land;* see also Worster, *Rivers of Empires*.

[9] These estimates are taken from various newspaper accounts. For a detailed breakdown of 1890s estimates, see pages 27 and 30. "Why Harvest Hands Rode Free," *Phillipsburg Herald* (Phillipsburg, KS), 7/5/1900, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029677/1900-07-05/ed-1/seq-3/; "Help for Farmers: Western States Organizing to Secure Harvest Hands," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 4/15/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1904-04-15/ed-1/seq-10/; "News Briefly Told," *The Loup Northwestern* (Loup City, NE), 6/3/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2018270203/1915-06-03/ed-1/seq-2/; "Kansas Needs 5,000 'Hands'" and "Needs no Harvest Hands," *The Hays Free Press* (Hays, KS), June 9, 1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029690/1917-06-09/ed-1/seq-7/; "Need 120,000 Men," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 4/16/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1919-04-16/ed-1/seq-1/; "Need 50,000 Men," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), June 2, 1920, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1920-06-02/ed-1/seq-7/; at least one other estimate puts the total at 250,000 total for the entire Plains: "'White Cross' Workers Friend," *The Herald-Advance* (Milbank, SD), 4/16/1920. https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn00065154/1920-04-16/ed-1/seq-7/.

[10] Lescohier, *Sources of Supply and Conditions of Employment of Harvest Labor in the Wheat Belt,* 1–10.

[11] Lescohier's estimates work with the data given by free employment bureaus regarding workers they placed—a self-selecting group who used these official channels to circumvent the informal networks of labor negotiation that other migrants used to find placement in the harvest fields. Work as a harvest hand was one of the most frequent jobs a hobo might undertake; see Anderon, *On Hobos and Homelessness,* 65, 85–6. The differences between "harvest hands," "hobos", and "tramps" often depended on the writer, but for the most part, "hobos" were those who moved to find work, "tramps" worked only to support a transient life, "bums" neither worked nor moved, and "harvest hands" could be hobos or tramps—or neither, simply day labor hired from nearby towns and farms.

[12] Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts;* Schwantes, *Hard Traveling;* Wyman, *Hoboes.*

[13] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies;* Hall, *Harvest Wobblies.*

[14] Hahamovitch, *Fruits of Their Labors,* 14–38.

[15] Hahamovitch's book does argue that it is the exaggerated labor demands of harvests that cause a demand for migrant workers, but does not allow for environmental differences between regions.

[16] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis.*

[17] Wright, "American Agriculture and the Labor Market."

[18] Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs.*

[19] Here, I refer to the idea of "political ecology" analogous to "political economy;" the social allocation of ecological resources; see e.g., Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life.*

[20] Scott, *Against the Grain,* 37–58.

[21] Worster, *Dust Bowl,* 71.

[22] On agriculture's relationship with nitrogen and phosphorous, see Melillo, *Strangers on Familiar Soil*.

[23] Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*; see also Donahue, *The Great Meadow*.

[24] On the movement into the Ohio River Valley, see Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order.* On the Great Plains, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* and Worster, *Dust Bowl;* on the American West more broadly, see Fiege, *Irrigated Eden.*

[25] Acreage figures come from both the *Fourteenth Census of the United States* and Clark, *Classification of American Wheat Varieties*; for the history of these varieties, see the latter, as well as Moon, "In the Russians' Steppes."

[26] See Cronon, Fiege, and Worster, but especially Brown, "Gridded Lives."

[27] Kaufman and Kaufman, "Wildlife Management in Central Kansas," Kaufman and Kaufman, "Small Mammals of Wheat Fields and Fallow Wheat Fields in North-Central Kansas," and Coppedge, et al., "Avian Response to Landscape Change in Fragmented Southern Great Plains Grasslands."

[28] Flores, *American Serengeti.*

[29] On the suppression of prairie fire, see Courtwright, *Prairie Fire;* on pollen counts, see Samson et al., "Great Plains Ecosystems;" Hall, "Modern Pollen Influx in Tallgrass and Shortgrass Prairies," Wright et al., "A chronological framework for the Holocene vegetational history of central Minnesota," and Dyke, "Late Quaternary Vegetation History of Northern North America."

[30] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 23–147.

[31] Evans, *Bound in Twine,* 1–3.

[32] Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory,* 15–16.

[33] Evans, *Bound in Twine,* 4–7.

[34] Anderson, *The American Hobo,* 98.

[35] Suits, et al., "Energy Transitions in U.S. History," 12–14.

[36] Schob, *Hired Hands and Plow Boys*.

[37] *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census,* xxxv.

[38] Reisner, *Cadillac Desert,* 41–2.

[39] See newspaper stories such as: "The Real Gold Mines," *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, KS), 9/12/1860, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015486/1860-09-13/ed-1/seq-2/; "Thingamajigs," *White Cloud Kansas Chief* (White Cloud, KS), 8/7/1862, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015486/1862-08-07/ed-1/seq-2/; "Harvest Help," *The Emporia News* (Emporia, KS), 6/16/1866, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ lccn/sn82016419/1866-06-16/ed-1/seq-3/.

[40] "Town and Country," *The Emporia News* (Emporia, KS), 7/23/1869, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016419/1869-07-23/ed-1/seq-3/.

[41] Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs,* 136–7. While both Lescohier and Isern express skepticism about how frequently hobos actually worked the entire harvest, Nels Anderson makes it abundantly clear that many hobos did exactly that; see Nels Anderson, *The American Hobo,* 89.

[42] Wright, "American Agriculture and the Labor Market," 196.

[43] Found in Wright, "American Agriculture and the Labor Market," 205.

[44] Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs,* 71–5. For binding, see also Evans, *Bound in Twine*.

[45] Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs,* 74–5.

[46] Anderson, *The American Hobo,* 98; Untitled, *The Goodland Republic* (Goodland, KS), 7/8/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030821/1892-07-08/ed-1/seq-4/; "Farmers Meet All Trains," *Evening Times-Republican* (Marshalltown, IA), 7/3/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85049554/1903-07-03/ed-1/seq-8/; "Search the Trains," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 7/6/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1903-07-06/ed-1/seq-1/.

[47] "Harvesting a Science Now," *The Daily Ardmoreite* (Ardmore, OK), 7/20/1909, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042303/1909-07-20/ed-1/seq-3/; "The Troubles of the Kansas Wheat Raiser," *Baxter Springs News* (Baxter Springs, KS), 7/25/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040592/1919-07-25/ed-1/seq-4/.

[48] Untitled, *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 7/17/1902, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1902-07-17/ed-1/seq-8/.

[49] "Snap Shots," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/16/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1915-06-16/ed-1/seq-4/.

[50] "Easterners Misunderstand Kansas Harvest Condition," *Abilene Weekly Reflector,* (Abilene, KS), 7/3/1913, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1913-07-03/ed-1/seq-9/. See also "Too Many Men," *The Madison Daily Leader* (Madison, SD), 8/14/1896, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99062034/1896-08-14/ed-1/seq-1/, as well as first-hand testimony from Joseph Burke, interview in *U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, 1912–1915: Unpublished*

Records of the Division of Research and Investigation: Reports, Staff Studies, and Background Research Materials, microfilm collection, reel 6.

[51] "State News," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 7/19/1895, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042588/1895-07-19/ed-1/seq-3/;"Jamestown: City and Vicinity," *Jamestown Weekly Alert* (Jamestown, ND), 7/25/1895, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042405/1895-07-25/ed-1/seq-7/; "New Harvest Hand Problem," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/3/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1915-06-03/ed-1/seq-4/; "Race of Men That Don't Fit in the Kansas Menace," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 7/15/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1916-07-15/ed-1/seq-15/.

[52] "Annual Influx of Hoboes Bound for Harvest Fields Causing Police Trouble," *The Alliance Herald* (Alliance, NE), 7/12/1921, C. A., https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2010270501/1921-07-12/ed-1/seq-2/.

[53] "'Harvest Hands,' Boys and Bums, Hit Town," *The Guthrie Daily Leader* (Guthrie, OK), 6/16/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063952/1915-06-16/ed-1/seq-1/.

[54] All instances where the words "harvest" and "hands" (or common permutations like "harvested," "harvesting," "hand," etc.) occurred within ten words of each other in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota newspapers in the Library of Congress database are displayed. Mentions are categorized as either simple "hiring notices," "scarcity of harvest hands," "surplus of harvest hands," or "other." Only reports on current conditions were included; this does not count the numerous speculations in springtime that the number of harvest hands would be low or high based on projections of the crop, nor retrospectives written in late fall and winter summarizing the supply of harvest hands for the previous season. Hiring notices include both "help wanted" advertisements and reports of farmers recruiting. Scarcity only includes direct reports of scarcity, rather than circumstantial evidence like high wages. Surplus includes only mentions of harvest hands looking for work but going idle, but does include newspaper reports that mention "tramps" or "hobos" and opine that their attempts to seek work are a sham—even the most skeptical reading of hobo narratives and accounts suggests that these efforts were usually in earnest. In the category of "other" were included reports of hands arriving and leaving (including incidental reports), but also various reports of harvest hands dying, becoming injured in accidents, getting arrested for disorderly conduct, drunkenness, getting robbed, getting in

fights, going on strike, , etc., as well as various "false positives" that included the phrase "the harvest is at hand," jokes, or ironic references to newborn children on the farm as "new harvest hands." Frequently, newspapers in the nineteenth century reprinted material from other newspapers, with or without attribution; in these cases of duplicate reports, they were only counted the initial time they appeared.

[55] See the footnote immediately above for various criteria for categorization. On occasion, newspaper stories mentioned violent or amusing incidents occurring to harvest hands arriving or leaving on the train or stopping over in a town; where possible, these were also used to help gauge their arrival and departure.

[56] Lescohier, *Sources of Supply and Conditions of Employment,* indicates that many hires were from local Kansas towns, as does Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs.*

[57] This came from western Kansas—see the *Goodland Republic,* July 13, 1894.

[58] "[A]n Emmons county farmer was in town one day recently to meet some harvest hands from South Dakota who were looking for work, there being no crop in the locality from which they came. [...] One can drive north from Linton for twenty miles and fields can be seen within a few rods of each other that will vary almost double in producing qualities," Untitled, *Emmons County Record* (Williamsport, ND), 7/31/1913, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87096040/1913-07-31/ed-1/seq-4/. See also "Harvest Help," *The Fargo Forum and Daily Republican* (Fargo, ND), 7/18/1911, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042224/1911-07-18/ed-1/seq-4/. "Harvest Begun in No. Dakota; Yield Spotted," *The Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 7/16/1921, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042243/1921-07-16/ed-1/seq-1/.

[59] Conditions taken from the daily weather maps produced by the national weather service, archived by the NOAA, "Daily Weather Maps."

[60] On the 1890 drought, see Sweeney, *Prelude to the Dust Bowl.* For the relative size of the harvests, see the *Report to the Secretary of Agriculture for the Year 1892.*

[61] Cook and Krusic, "The North American Drought Atlas."

[62] "Local Comment," *Barton County Democrat* (Great Bend, KS), 2/25/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040198/1892-02-25/ed-1/seq-5/.

[63] "Neighborhood Happenings," *Barton County Democrat* (Great Bend, KS), 3/10/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040198/1892-03-10/ed-1/seq-1/; Untitled, *The Mitchell*

Capital (Mitchell, SD), 3/11/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1892-03-11/ed-1/seq-4/.

[64] "Neighborhood Happenings," *Barton County Democrat* (Great Bend, KS), 6/2/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040198/1892-06-02/ed-1/seq-1/.

[65] *Annual Report of the Board of Trade of the City of Chicago.*

[66] "Official Weather," *Western Kansas World* (WaKeeney, KS), 6/4/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015485/1892-06-04/ed-1/seq-6/.

[67] Untitled, *The Goodland Republic,* (Goodland, Kan.), 7/8/1892.

[68] Untitled, *Western Kansas World* (WaKeeney, KS), 7/30/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015485/1892-07-30/ed-1/seq-4/.

[69] "Personals," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, KS), 7/7/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1892-07-07/ed-1/seq-5/.

[70] "Harvest Hand Excursions," *Salina Herald* (Salina, KS), 7/1/1892, https://www.newspapers.com/image/484606711/; Untitled, *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 7/10/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1892-07-10/ed-1/seq-8/; "1892 to Be a Record-Breaker," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, KS), 7/7/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1892-07-07/ed-1/seq-4/.

[71] See Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs,* 149–50.

[72] "Neighborhood Happenings," *Barton County Democrat* (Great Bend, KS), 6/9/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040198/1892-06-09/ed-1/seq-1/; "State News," *Chase County Leader* (Cottonwood Falls, KS), 7/21/1892, https://www.newspapers.com/image/341787725/.

[73] *Report to the Secretary of Agriculture for the Year 1892.*

[74] "Big Crop in Kansas," *St. Paul Daily Globe* (Saint Paul, MN), 7/2/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059522/1892-07-02/ed-1/seq-3/.

[75] *Report to the Secretary of Agriculture for the Year 1892.*

[76] "The Crop Calls for Help," *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 7/27/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1892-07-27/ed-1/seq-4/.

[77] "Harvest Hands Wanted," *Canadian Courier and Courier-Tribune* (El Reno, OK), 8/4/1892, https://www.newspapers.com/image/582947840/.

[78] "Local Items," *The Bottineau Pioneer* (Bottineau, ND), 8/6/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076679/1892-08-06/ed-1/seq-1/.

[79] "Wheat Prospects," *Jamestown Weekly Alert* (Jamestown, Stutsman County, ND), 8/25/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042405/1892-08-25/ed-1/seq-1/.

[80] See a report on a harvest hand leaving and getting murdered: "Murdered While He Slept," *St. Paul Daily Globe* (Saint Paul, MN), 10/20/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059522/1892-10-20/ed-1/seq-1/.

[81] This map uses the same Chronicling America newspaper source base as the charts above. Additional reports have been culled from Newspapers.com, which, while too inconsistent to include in the newspaper report charts, do provide some additional insight into harvest hand hiring and movement.

[82] "U.S. Department of Agriculture Weather Map," 9/18/1893, from "Daily Weather Maps," *National Climatic Data Center.*

[83] Cook and Krusic, "The North American Drought Atlas."

[84] "Local Comment," *Barton County Democrat* (Great Bend, KS), 6/1/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040198/1893-06-01/ed-1/seq-8/.

[85] "County Correspondence," *People's Voice* (Wellington, KS), 6/23/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032801/1893-06-23/ed-1/seq-4/.

[86] Untitled, *Phillipsburg Herald* (Phillipsburg, KS), 7/27/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029677/1893-07-27/ed-1/seq-2/.

[87] "Wheat Prices since the 13th Century," *Our World in Data.*

[88] "Harvest Wages," *The Madison Daily Leader* (Madison, SD), 7/20/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99062034/1893-07-20/ed-1/seq-2/; "Around the State," *Bismarck Weekly Tribune* (Bismarck, Dakota ND), 8/4/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042588/1893-08-04/ed-1/seq-7/.

[89] Untitled, *Phillipsburg Herald* (Phillipsburg, KS), 7/27/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029677/1893-07-27/ed-1/seq-2/.

[90] "County Correspondence," *People's Voice* (Wellington, KS), 6/23/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032801/1893-06-23/ed-1/seq-4/; "Nearly All No. 1," *The Redwood Gazette* (Redwood Falls, MN), 8/10/1893, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025570/1893-08-10/ed-1/seq-2/.

[91] Sweeney, *Prelude to the Dust Bowl,* 157–216.

[92] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire.*

[93] Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order.*

[94] Carter, et al., *Historical Statistics of the United States.*

[95] Belich, *Replenishing the Earth.*

[96] See Bennett, "Trends of Yields in Major Wheat Regions since 1885," and Suhara, "Russian Agricultural Statistics;" American papers noted the harvests of each; see reports like (for the Australian case) "Wheat Harvest Poor," *The Cooperstown Courier* (Cooperstown, ND), 11/13/1902, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076341/1902-11-13/ed-1/seq-2/.

[97] Postel, *The Populist Vision.*

[98] DeBruler, "Carrying Grain in Boxcars."

[99] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 97–147.

[100] Levi, *Food, Control, and Resistance.* See also Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts;* Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890.*

[101] See Wayland, *Papers on Out-Door Relief and Tramps.* See also Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 98–137; DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 3–29.

[102] See again Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts.*

[103] Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs,* 130–173.

[104] "Lewelling's Tramp Circular," *Kansas Agitator,* (Garnett, KS), 12/21/1893, 5.

[105] "Criminal Notes," *Wichita Daily Eagle* 8/30/1892, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1892-08-30/ed-1/seq-2/; "Killed a Harvest Hand," *Abilene Weekly Reflector,* 7/5/1900, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1900-07-05/ed-1/seq-1/; "Doc Kelly Stabbed," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, KS), 7/10/1900, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1900-07-10/ed-1/seq-5/.

[106] "Jamestown: City and Vicinity," *Jamestown Weekly Alert* (Jamestown, ND), 7/25/1895, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042405/1895-07-25/ed-1/seq-7/; Untitled, *The People's Voice* (Wellington, KS), 8/23/1900, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032801/1900-08-23/ed-1/seq-2/; Untitled, *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, KS), 6/30/1901, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1901-06-30/ed-1/seq-12/.

[107] "Smallpox at Carrington," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 8/23/1901, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042242/1901-08-23/ed-1/seq-2/; see also later examples like "Typhoid Appears in Kansas," *Abilene Weekly Reflector* (Abilene, KS) 6/18/1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1914-06-18/ed-1/seq-8/; "Harvest Hands Carry Cholera," *Dakota County Herald* (Dakota City, NE), 8/19/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/2010270500/1915-08-19/ed-1/seq-4/

[108] Untitled, *People's Voice* (Wellington, KS), 6/28/1900, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85032801/1900-06-28/ed-1/seq-3/; see again "Jamestown: City and Vicinity," *Jamestown Weekly Alert,* 7/25/1895.

[109] See again "Criminal Notes," *Wichita Daily Eagle,* August 30, 1892; "Tramp Attacks Girl," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/19/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1915-06-19/ed-1/seq-7/.

[110] Charles Ashleigh, *Rambling Kid,* 1930, in McIntyre, *On the Fly!* 202–3.

[111] In McIntyre, *On the Fly!* 215–6.

[112] Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All.*

[113] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies;* Hall, *Harvest Wobblies.*

[114] McIntyre, *On the Fly!* 215.

[115] "They Come Early," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 4/9/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1903-04-09/ed-1/seq-10/; "In Short Grass Land," *The Globe-Republican* (Dodge City, KS), 4/16/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029853/1903-04-16/ed-1/seq-1/.

[116] "Farm Labor Poorly Paid," *Warren Sheaf* (Warren, MN), 1/22/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059228/1903-01-22/ed-1/seq-8/.

[117] Untitled, *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 5/15/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042242/1903-05-15/ed-1/seq-2/.

[118] "Along the Kansas Nile," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, KS), 4/22/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1903-04-22/ed-1/seq-4/.

[119] "Special Harvest Rate," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 5/21/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1903-05-21/ed-1/seq-3/.

[120] "Along the Kansas Nile," *The Wichita Daily Eagle* (Wichita, KS), 5/17/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1903-05-17/ed-1/seq-20/.

[121] For example, some Stafford County farmers paid their hands to wait around for a month before the harvest; see "Want 500 Men," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 5/27/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1903-05-27/ed-1/seq-6/.

[122] "Report of Kansas Employment Bureau," *Abilene Weekly Reflector* (Abilene, KS), 1/28/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1904-01-28/ed-1/seq-4/.

[123] "Rates Are Now Effective," *The Saint Paul Globe* (St. Paul, MN), 7/28/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059523/1903-07-28/ed-1/seq-9/.

[124] "Must Pay or Walk," *The Mitchell Capital* (Mitchell, SD), 7/31/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1903-07-31/ed-1/seq-3/.

[125] Tom Thurlby, "If the Farmer Would Make It Look Like a Government Job He Would Get Plenty of Harvest Hands," *The Saint Paul Globe* (St. Paul, MN), 7/24/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059523/1903-07-24/ed-1/seq-1/.

[126] "Local News and Comment," *Morris Tribune* (Morris, MN), 8/8/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn91059394/1903-08-08/ed-1/seq-5/.

[127] "Warned Against Burglars," *The Saint Paul Globe* (St. Paul, MN), 8/13/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059523/1903-08-13/ed-1/seq-3/.

[128] "Help for the Farmers," *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 10/25/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1903-10-25/ed-1/seq-5/; "Interstate Labor Bureau," *Abilene Weekly Reflector* (Abilene, KS), 1/7/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1904-01-07/ed-1/seq-8/.

[129] "Harvest Hands Are Sought Early," *The Saint Paul Globe* (St. Paul, MN), 4/15/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059523/1904-04-15/ed-1/seq-1/.

[130] Untitled, *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 3/19/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1904-03-19/ed-1/seq-12/.

[131] Untitled, *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 4/15/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1904-04-15/ed-1/seq-6/.

[132] "Daily Weather Maps," *National Climatic Data Center.*

[133] Lebergott, "Annual Estimates of Unemployment in the United States."

[134] "Surplus of Harvest Hands," *The Kinsley Graphic* (Kinsley, KS), 6/24/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029671/1904-06-24/ed-1/seq-4/.

[135] "Anxious" men from "Harvest Hands Ride Free," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/27/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1904-06-27/ed-1/seq-2/; longer quote from "Latest News in Brief," *The Globe-Republican* (Dodge City, KS), 6/30/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029853/1904-06-30/ed-1/seq-7/; other reports on these conditions include: "Heavy Rains Over the Southwest Harvest Fields Delay Work," *The Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), 6/24/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045366/1904-06-24/ed-1/seq-16/; "Have Sent 400 Hands," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/29/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1904-06-29/ed-1/seq-4/.

[136] "Jayhawker Jots," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/22/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1904-06-22/ed-1/seq-4/.

[137] "'Harvest Hands' Establish a Camp at Ellsworth," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 7/2/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1904-07-02/ed-1/seq-2/.

[138] "Jayhawker Jots," *The Topeka State Journal,* 6/22/1904.

[139] "Roads Say Laborers Will Be Plentiful," *The Saint Paul Globe* (St. Paul, MN), 7/1/1904, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059523/1904-07-01/ed-1/seq-4/.

[140] Anderson, *The American Hobo,* 49.

[141] North Dakota homesteader Mary Dodge Woodward complained in the mid-1880s about the problem of having to deal with unfamiliar men in her diary; see Woodward, *The Checkered Years,* pp. 140, 197. This

sentiment is also apparent—and clearly continues in the twentieth century—in how frequently the danger of strangers is emphasized in the surrounding newspaper accounts.

[142] Anderson, *On Hoboes and Homelessness,* 178–9.

[143] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*.

[144] Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*.

[145] A brief (hostile) history of these efforts is given here: "S. D. Battle with Radicals Started in 1908," *The Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 7/23/1921, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042243/1921-07-23/ed-1/seq-3/. Further histories (and details on the radicals of the Dakotas and their relations with harvest hands) can be found in Higbie's wonderful treatment of the matter: Higbie, 134–65. See also (again mostly hostile) primary treatments in: Untitled, *Courier Democrat* (Langdon, ND), 9/4/1913, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076432/1913-09-04/ed-1/seq-4/; "Organized at Duluth," *The Bottineau Courant* (Bottineau, ND), 8/15/1913, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076086/1913-08-15/ed-1/seq-1/; "I. W. W. Busy at Cdano [sic] Attempting to Organize Incoming Harvest Hands," *Grand Forks Daily Herald and the Evening Times* (Grand Forks, ND), 07 Aug. 1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89074404/1914-08-07/ed-1/seq-8/; "South Dakota Harvest Opened," *The Lemmon Herald* (Lemmon, SD), 8/9/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89074986/1916-08-09/ed-1/seq-1/; "$1.00 an Hour Is Aim of I. W. W.," *The Bowbells Tribune* (Bowbells, ND), 9/5/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076095/1919-09-05/ed-1/seq-1/.

[146] Quote from "Industrial Workers Reported Active," *Jamestown Weekly Alert* (Jamestown, ND), 10 Aug. 1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042405/1916-08-10/ed-1/seq-2/. See also: "Farmers Find Iron Rods in Wheat Fields," *Abilene Weekly Reflector* (Abilene, KS), 6/24/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1915-06-24/ed-1/seq-11/; "I. W. W. Men Attack Farmers," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 9/18/1913, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042242/1913-09-18/ed-1/seq-2/; "Damage Threshing Outfits," *The Oakes Times* (Oakes, ND), 9/18/1913, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87096017/1913-09-18/ed-1/seq-3/. An earlier, pre-IWW example of apparent sabotage is in "A Dirty Trick," *Griggs Courier*

(Cooperstown, ND), 9/14/1899, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076998/1899-09-14/ed-1/seq-7/.

147 Untitled, *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 9/9/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042242/1916-09-09/ed-1/seq-4/.

148 "I.W.W. Carry on Industrial War," *The Abilene Weekly Reflector* (Abilene, KS), 7/13/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029386/1916-07-13/ed-1/seq-2/; "Guard Salina Jail," *Meade County News* (Meade, KS), 7/20/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85030287/1916-07-20/ed-1/seq-6/; "I.W.W. at Work," *Barton County Democrat* (Great Bend, KS), 7/19/1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040198/1914-06-19/ed-1/seq-1/.

149 "Harvest Fields of Nebraska Are Free From Reds," *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 7/30/1920, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1920-07-30/ed-1/seq-1/.

150 A sympathetic article: "Mitchell Has Troubles with the Unemployed," *The Mobridge News* (Mobridge, SD), 8/3/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn98069043/1916-08-03/ed-1/seq-10/.

151 Anderson, *On Hoboes and Homelessness,* 87–8.

152 Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation,* 12–41.

153 "Riotous Times in Aberdeen Caused by I. W. W. Hoboes," *The Mitchell Capital* (Mitchell, SD), 7/23/1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1914-07-23/ed-1/seq-7/; "I. W. W. Agitators Try to Terrorize Aberdeen," *The Tabor Independent* (Tabor, SD), 7/23/1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99062018/1914-07-23/ed-1/seq-6/; "News of South Dakota," *Philip Weekly Review and Bad River News* (Philip, SD), 7/30/1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn95076626/1914-07-30/ed-1/seq-3/.

154 "Riotous Times in Aberdeen," *Mitchell Capital.*

155 "Riotous Times in Aberdeen," *Mitchell Capital.*

156 "I. W. W. Agitators Try to Terrorize Aberdeen," *The Tabor Independent;* "Dakota Men Control Outbreak of I. W. W. by Using Shotguns," *Forest City Press* (Forest City, SD), 8/2/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93057084/1916-08-02/ed-1/seq-2/; "Whole Northwest Is Now Menaced," *The Brookings Register* (Brookings, SD), 8/3/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042792/1916-08-03/ed-1/seq-1/; "Weller Talks on Farm

Labor," *The Mitchell Capital* (Mitchell, SD), 8/10/1916, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1916-08-10/ed-1/seq-2/.

[157] "Guard Salina Jail," *Meade County News,* July 20, 1916.

[158] "Mitchell Has Troubles with the Unemployed," *Mobridge News;* "Mitchell Vigilantes Hold Guns All Night on Rioting I. W. Ws," *The Mitchell Capital* (Mitchell, SD), 8/3/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1916-08-03/ed-1/seq-7/; "Mitchell Disarms 600 I.W.W.'s and Arrests Leaders," *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 7/30/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1916-07-30/ed-1/seq-1/; "I. W. W. Leaders Are Chased Out," *The Mitchell Capital* (Mitchell, SD), 8/3/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1916-08-03/ed-1/seq-7/. Notably, this latter example advocated for "Ku Klux Klan methods" to be implemented against the IWW activists.

[159] "$11.45 per Day Fair Wage, Says I. W. W. Backer," *The Fargo Forum and Daily Republican* (Fargo, ND), 6/27/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042224/1917-06-27/ed-1/seq-1/.

[160] "Harvest Hand Meets Death in Battle with Members of the I.W.W.," *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), 7/23/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn99021999/1916-07-23/ed-1/seq-6/.

[161] Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts,* 153.

[162] First quote from Nels Anderson, "Document 26," Ernest Watson Burgess Papers, Box 127, Folder 1, University of Chicago Special Collections, Chicago, IL (hereafter UoCSC); second two from "Document 71," Ernest Watson Burgess Papers, Box 127, Folder 2, UoCSC.

[163] "Document 95," Ernest Watson Burgess Papers, Box 127, Folder 3, UoCSC.

[164] "Document 44," Ernest Watson Burgess Papers, Box 127, Folder 1, UoCSC.

[165] Anderson, *On Hoboes and Homelessness,* 179.

[166] "Why McCormick Changed from the Left to the Right Hand Binder," *The Kinsley Graphic* (Kinsley, KS), 5/7/1897, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029671/1897-05-07/ed-1/seq-2/.

[167] Woodruff, *Evolution of American Agriculture,* 72.

[168] Woodruff, *Evolution of American Agriculture,* 72.

[169] Brown, *"Broke,"* 211; "Harvest War Song," in *I. W. W. Songs*, 12–13 and E. W. Latchem, "The Modern Agricultural Slave," *One Big Union Monthly,* 8/1920 in McIntyre, *On the Fly!* 220.

[170] McIntyre, *On the Fly!* 201.

[171] See footnote 8.

[172] Wright, "American Agriculture and the Labor Market."

[173] For Progressive-era faith in government, see Sanders, *Roots of Reform* and McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*.

[174] "It Works Very Well," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 1/7/1903, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1903-01-07/ed-1/seq-7/.

[175] "Need 35,000 Hands," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/8/1915, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1915-06-08/ed-1/seq-5/. "Labor Agent Stanley Shows What May Be Accomplished in Labor Distribution," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 10/8/1916, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042242/1916-10-08/ed-1/seq-10/.

[176] "Are You Ready for Action? Be Prepared," *The Liberal Democrat* (Liberal, KS), 6/19/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029856/1919-06-19/ed-1/seq-12/; "Keep the Harvesters Satisfied," *The Liberal Democrat* (Liberal, KS), 7/10/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85029856/1919-07-10/ed-1/seq-6/.

[177] "The Farm Kitchen," *The Bottineau Courant* (Bottineau, ND), 11/20/1914, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076086/1914-11-20/ed-1/seq-7/.

[178] "90,000 Harvest Hands," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 2/6/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-02-06/ed-1/seq-8/; "Labor Problem Will Present Difficulties," *Grand Forks Herald* (Grand Forks, ND), 7/20/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042414/1918-07-20/ed-1/seq-3/. Note that the latter article suggests around 100,000 were eventually needed in Kansas, and offers no estimate for the Minnesota side of the Red River Valley.

[179] "Meeting of Farm Labor Committee," *The Hays Free Press* (Hays, KS), 3/28/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84029690/1918-03-28/ed-1/seq-8/.

[180] "Draft Men to Harvest," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/15/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-06-15/ed-1/seq-7/.

[181] "Agan Approves Plan for Enlistment of Farm Labor," *The Fargo Forum and Daily Republican* (Fargo, ND), 4/14/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042224/1917-04-14/ed-1/seq-1/.

[182] "Bainer is Helping," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/4/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-06-04/ed-1/seq-3/.

[183] "Meeting of Farm Labor Committee," *The Hays Free Press* (Hays, KS), 3/28/1918.

[184] "Free 'Phone Service," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/12/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-06-12/ed-1/seq-5/; "Open Harvest Hand Stations," *Baxter Springs News* (Baxter Springs, KS), 6/7/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83040592/1918-06-07/ed-1/seq-5/.

[185] "Eat Corn Bread," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 5/7/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-05-07/ed-1/seq-4/.

[186] "Need 90,000 Men," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 5/23/1918, and "Kansas Army of Harvest Hands in Biggest Drive," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 6/12/1918, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1918-06-12/ed-1/seq-1/.

[187] "South Dakota Plans to Meet I. W. W. Drive," *The Fargo Forum and Daily Republican* (Fargo, ND), 7/23/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042224/1917-07-23/ed-1/seq-2/; "Spink Is Ready for I. W. W. Gang," *The Mitchell Capital* (Mitchell, SD) 7/26/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn2001063112/1917-07-26/ed-1/seq-1/; "Nation-Wide Industrial Strike Is Threatened," *The Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), 7/31/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042243/1917-07-31/ed-1/seq-1/; "Want $4.50 Day at Jamestown; I. W. W. Gang Issues Ultimatum," The Fargo Forum and Daily Republican (Fargo, N.D.), 8/1/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042224/1917-08-01/ed-1/seq-10/; "Strike Sentiment Grows," *The Brookings Register* (Brookings, SD), 8/9/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042792/1917-08-09/ed-1/seq-5/; "I. W. W. Strike in Four States Fails," *The Oakes Times* (Oakes, ND), 8/23/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87096017/1917-08-23/ed-1/seq-4/; "Many Wobblies Reaching City," *Grand Forks Herald* (Grand Forks, ND), 8/28/1917, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042414/1917-08-28/ed-1/seq-12/.

[188] Higbie, 151–64; Dubofsky, 376–422.

[189] Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*. Note that IWW mentions still surface in newspapers in the Dakotas after the war, but that these are far more subdued than those before the war.

[190] "Want Gov't Roads," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 1/17/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1919-01-17/ed-1/seq-10/.

[191] "Wheat Growers Meet, *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 4/18/1919, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1919-04-18/ed-1/seq-5/.

[192] See again Sanders, *Roots of Reform.*

[193] Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire;* Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road;* Scott, *Against the Grain,* 219–257; Dubar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States,* 152–91.

[194] Davis, *The Arid Lands,* 49–116; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 97–262; Dunbar-Ortiz, *Indigenous Peoples' History,* 152–91; Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppe;* Belich, *Replenishing the Earth;* Moon, *The American Steppes;* Adelman, *Frontier Development;* Scobie, *Revolution on the Pampas.* See also Levy, *Ages of American Capitalism,* 249–57; Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.

[195] Hopkins, *Ruling the Savage Periphery;* Maier, *Leviathan, 2.0;* Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 97–262.

[196] Wishart, *The Last Days of the Rainbelt,* 7.