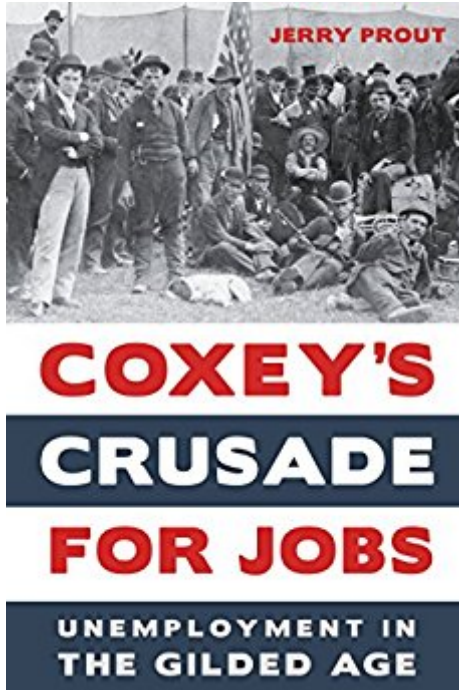


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Coxey's Crusade For Jobs: Unemployment In The Gilded Age



Synopsis

In the depths of a depression in 1894, a highly successful Gilded Age businessman named Jacob Coxey led a group of jobless men on a march from his hometown of Massillon, Ohio, to the steps of the nation's Capitol. Though a financial panic and the resulting widespread business failures caused millions of Americans to be without work at the time, the word unemployment was rarely used and generally misunderstood. In an era that worshipped the self-reliant individual who triumphed in a laissez-faire market, the out-of-work tramp was disparaged as weak or flawed, and undeserving of assistance. Private charities were unable to meet the needs of the jobless, and only a few communities experimented with public works programs. Despite these limitations, Coxey conceived a plan to put millions back to work building a nationwide system of roads and drew attention to his idea with the march to Washington. In *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs*, Jerry Prout recounts Coxey's story and adds depth and context by focusing on the reporters who were embedded in the march. Their fascinating depictions of life on the road occupied the headlines and front pages of America's newspapers for more than a month, turning the spectacle into a serialized drama. These accounts humanized the idea of unemployment and helped Americans realize that in a new industrial economy, unemployment was not going away and the unemployed deserved attention. This unique study will appeal to scholars and students interested in the Gilded Age and US and labor history.

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Customer Reviews

I have just finished an eloquent, well-researched book that reminds us that fighting for justice, equality, and the welfare of all citizens began a long time ago and involves not only politics and policy, but also faith, the arts and culture, and an informed press. Importantly, it also reminds us that while the arc of history bends toward justice, that bending takes time, often measured in generations. I speak of a most timely history that I finished last evening: "Coxey's Crusade for Jobs - Unemployment in the Gilded Age," by the renowned Jerry Prout (152 pages, Northern Illinois University Press). The march to Washington that is the centerpiece of Professor Prout's exhaustively researched work - an "army of proud men seeking honest jobs" - was the first known campaign of its kind in the U.S. Jacob Coxey, a prosperous industrialist and horse trader, mounted his crusade in the midst of the 1893 Panic and long depression that followed. Millions of working-class Americans who were just tasting the fruits of what had been a rising economy were thrown on the street, at a time when the term "unemployment" was not even in regular use - at a time when no entity, public or private, even tried to calculate the jobs impact of that depression - at a time when these newly jobless were characterized as tramps who deserved no more than the bitter fruits of desperate privation they were enduring. Coxey, a prime example of the Horatio Alger striver who pulled himself up from the bottom of the heap, did not adopt the view of Social Darwinists like most business magnates that life was "sink or swim."

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