



# PLEASANT PRAIRIE'S "BIG BOOM"

A STORY OF INDUSTRY, LABOR, PROTEST, &  
MONOPOLIES IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY



# CITIZENS PROTESTING

Pleasant Prairie May Seek to Prevent Re-building of the Powder Mills

FEAR FUTURE EXPLOSIONS

Managers of the Company Are Now Coming to Kenosha From Patterson to Make Plans for Re-building

## GRAND CONCERT

Singing Society Brage to Give Concert at A. O. U. W. Hall May 26

The singing society Brage, which it will be remembered gave the big Saengerfest at Anderson park last summer in which several outside clubs took part, has now, after nine months of hard work, decided to give a concert where the best talent obtainable will take part. To begin with Kenosha's favorite, Miss Josephine Jacoby, will play one or two of her charming solos. Miss Nancy Hansen, Racine's leading mezzo soprano, will sing for the first time to a Kenosha audience and you want to hear her. Jacoby's orchestra will discourse sweet selections arranged for the occasion. The popular singing

PROTESTING THE PLANT

1906

# PUBLIC NUISANCE

*“There are grave fears that should an explosion occur which would include the entire plant, Kenosha would be pretty badly shaken and there would be great loss of property.”*

*Kenosha Evening News, May 21, 1906.*



Corning Mill, November 1907  
*Courtesy of Hagley Museum & Library.*

# THE BIG BOOM

MARCH 9, 1911



# MARCH 9, 1911

2.6 million pounds of black powder and five boxcars full of dynamite exploded at the Laflin & Rand Powder Plant.

- ❖ Buildings within five miles were uninhabitable
- ❖ Shock reportedly felt 500 miles away
- ❖ \$1.5 million (around \$43 million today) in damages
- ❖ Several hundred people injured
- ❖ One person died—E. S. Thompson



# SAFETY PROCEDURE

DUPONT COMPANY

H 24  
ONE OF TWO BUILDINGS LEFT STANDING  
AFTER POWDER EXPLOSION PLEASANT...

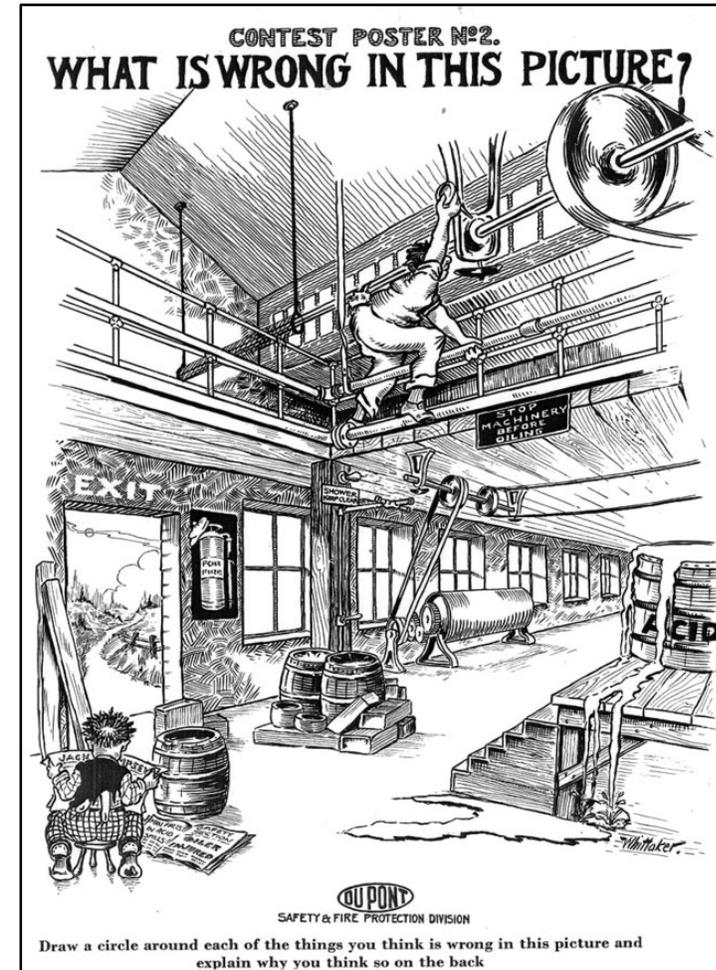
# 1911 SAFETY COMMISSION

## *DuPont Company Fatality Rate*

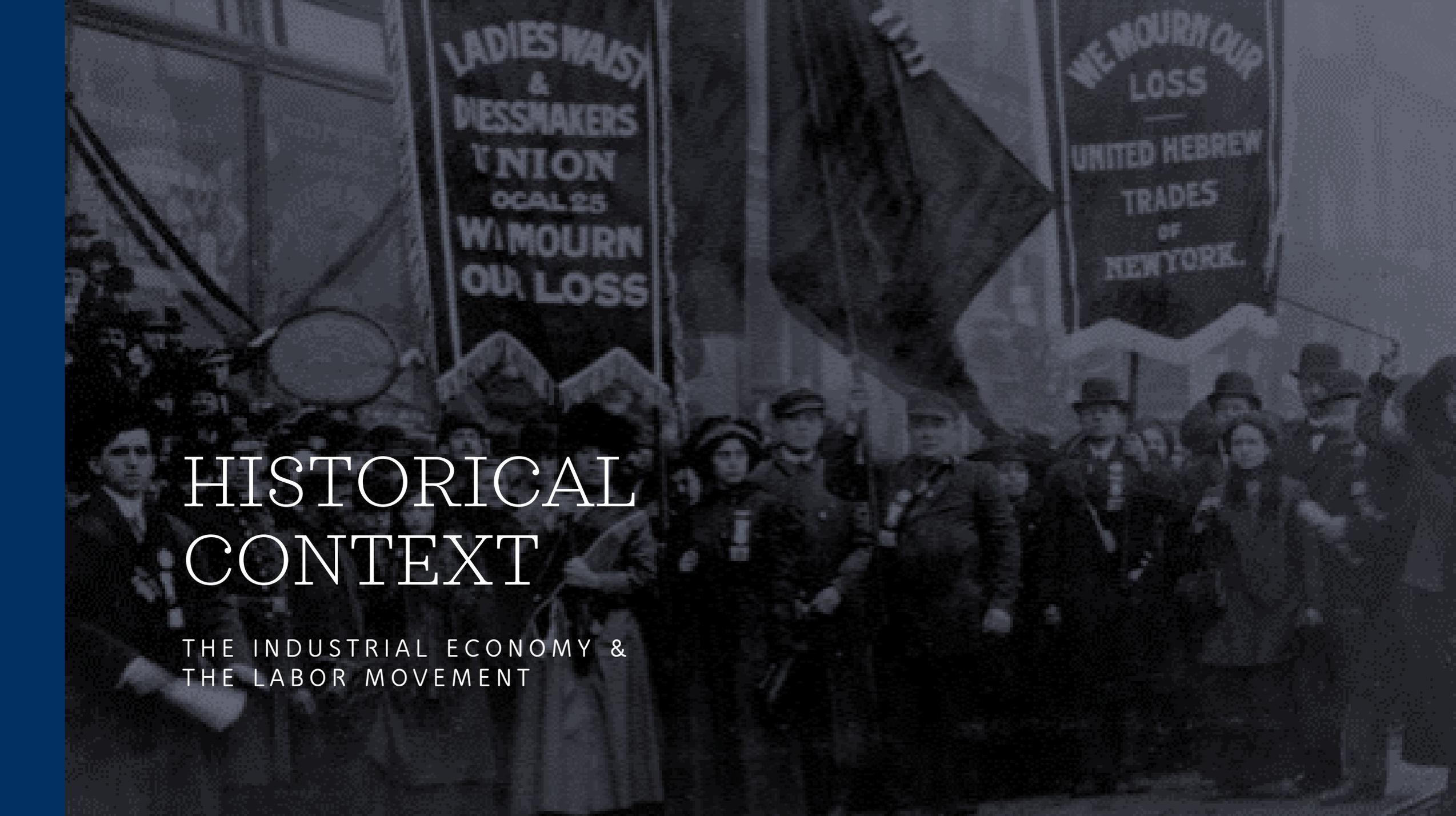
- ❖ 1910—5.66 per million hours of exposure
- ❖ 1931—0.09 per million hours of exposure



Workers at the Eleutherian Mills in Wilmington, DE.  
*Courtesy of Hagley Museum & Library.*



DuPont corporate safety contest, 1928.  
*Courtesy of Hagley Museum & Library.*

A black and white photograph of a labor rally. In the foreground, a group of people, including men and women, are gathered. Behind them, several large banners are held up. The banners contain text such as 'LADIES WAIST & DRESSMAKERS UNION LOCAL 25 WE MOURN OUR LOSS', '1111', and 'WE MOURN OUR LOSS UNITED HEBREW TRADES OF NEW YORK'. The scene is set outdoors, possibly in front of a building with large windows.

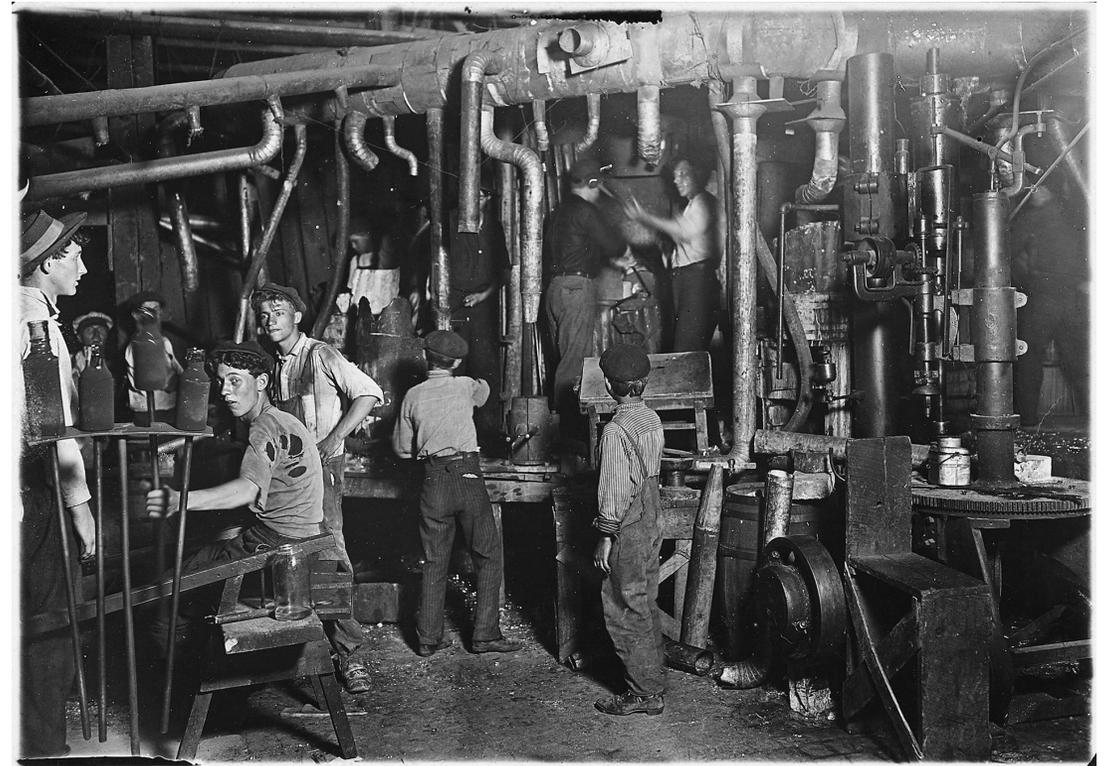
# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY &  
THE LABOR MOVEMENT

# INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

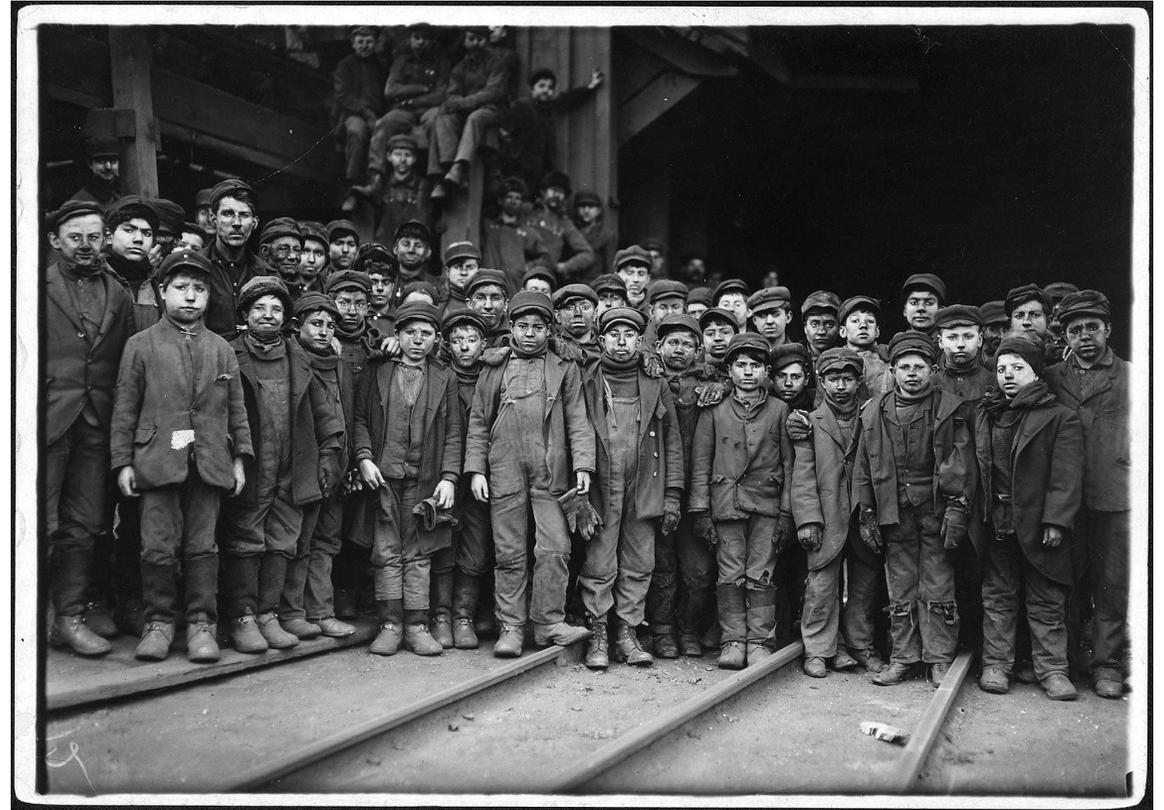
- ❖ Agrarian & Rural → Industrial & Urban
- ❖ 1880—first time majority of workforce working non-farming jobs
- ❖ 1890—2/3 working for wages, rather than farming or owning a business
- ❖ 1913—U.S. produces 1/3 of the world's total industrial output
- ❖ Emergence of the modern corporation

*U.S. National Archives*



# LABOR MOVEMENT

- ❖ 1870—First national union, the Knights of Labor, is formed
- ❖ 1886—Haymarket Riot
- ❖ 1886—American Federation of Labor is founded & focuses on more moderate goals
- ❖ 1892—Homestead Steel Strike
- ❖ 1894—Pullman Rail Strike



*U.S. National Archives*

# TRIANGLE SHIRTTWAIST FIRE

**March 25, 1911**

Fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City results in the death of 146 workers.

❖ Key moment in workplace safety reform



# LABOR LAWS

- ❖ **1913**—U.S. Department of Labor formed
- ❖ **1914**—Clayton Antitrust Act allows employees to strike and boycott their employers
- ❖ **1916**—Adamson Act is the first federal law to affect the terms of employment by private companies. It also created an eight-hour workday for railroad workers.
- ❖ **1938**—Fair Labor Standards Act mandates a minimum wage, extra pay for overtime work, and basic child labor laws





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