

The period from 1877- 1913 was an amazing time of growth in America. The population was growing at a staggering rate. In 1860 the population was 31,443,321 and grew to 76,212,168 in 1900 and by 1910 it was 92,228,496. Railroads, the epitome of the industrialization, expanded from about 30,000 miles of track before the Civil War to nearly 270,000 miles in 1900. The industrial labor force nearly tripled between 1880 and 1910 to about 8 million. Large factories, which had existed only in the textile industry before the Civil War, became common in a variety of industries.

Labor was in high demand to run these new factories. Unfortunately, the continued high population growth led by increasing numbers of immigrants helped to keep the value of individual workers low. Aware of this problem, workers joined labor unions at a steady rate and organized and resisted threats to their way of life and health. They did this despite the fact that factory owners and managers detested the existence of unions and did everything that they could to reduce their influence. In 1909, managers of New York's Triangle Shirtwaist Company fired employees who were suspected of promoting unionization. In protest, Triangle workers walked off the job. Garment workers from other factories soon joined them. Triangle management refused to be swayed, hiring prostitutes to taunt the workers and thugs to beat them. Strikers did not give in and were eventually joined by 20,000 to 30,000 more garment workers. The strike went on for 13 weeks during the cold winter of 1909-1910. When the strike ended in February, the workers had made few gains. The "Uprising of the 20,000" was soon forgotten, at least by management.