



# Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America

By James Green

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On May 4, 1886, a bomb exploded at a Chicago labor rally, wounding dozens of policemen, seven of whom eventually died. A wave of mass hysteria swept the country, leading to a sensational trial, that culminated in four controversial executions, and dealt a blow to the labor movement from which it would take decades to recover. Historian James Green recounts the rise of the first great labor movement in the wake of the Civil War and brings to life an epic twenty-year struggle for the eight-hour workday. Blending a gripping narrative, outsized characters and a panoramic portrait of a major social movement, *Death in the Haymarket* is an important addition to the history of American capitalism and a moving story about the class tensions at the heart of Gilded Age America.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

As Green thoroughly documents, the bloody Haymarket riot of May 4, 1886, changed the history of American labor and created a panic among Americans about (often foreign-born) "radicals and reformers" and union activists. The Haymarket demonstration, to protest police brutality during labor unrest in Chicago, remained peaceful until police moved in, whereupon a bomb was thrown by an individual never positively identified, killing seven policemen and wounding 60 others. Shortly after, labor leaders August Spies and Albert Parsons, along with six more alleged anarchists, stood convicted of murder on sparse evidence. Four of them went to the gallows in 1887; another committed suicide. The surviving three received pardons in 1893. The Knights of Labor, at that time America's largest and most energetic union, received the blame for the riot, despite a lack of conclusive evidence, and many Knights locals migrated to the less radical American Federation of Labor. Labor historian Green (*Taking History to Heart*) eloquently chronicles all this, producing what will surely be the definitive word on the Haymarket affair for this generation. Green is particularly strong in documenting the episode's long aftermath, especially the decades-long efforts of the white Parsons's black wife to exonerate her husband. B&w illus. (Mar. 7)

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From [Booklist](#)

Green, an academic, offers a narrative history of Chicago's Haymarket bombing in 1886, the infamous trial that followed, and the hanging of subsequently determined innocent men. Chicago was then at the heart of the labor struggle for the eight-hour day, and we learn that "workers' struggles had often been met with shocking repression, and that when violence bred violence, when powerless laboring people struck back in anger, they often paid with their lives." The Haymarket episode became a seminal moment for the American labor movement, and Green takes us inside the personal, social, and cultural elements of this tragic event. Evaluation of Haymarket includes the contention that a conservative bias against radicals, labor organizers, immigrants, and minorities was fundamental to the conflict as well as the view that execution of the anarchists saved the country from anarchy and was a moral and political victory for law and order. The author notes that after Haymarket, social peace among the various classes in Chicago was impossible, and grudges continued for decades. *Mary Whaley*

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Review

"Definitive. . . . Green's dramatic narrative tells a powerful story about injustice, passion, prejudice and fanaticism."—*The Chicago Tribune*"Though a number of prominent historians have written about the Haymarket Affair, no one has told the story more thoroughly, incisively and elegantly than Green. . . . He has reconstructed both the context and the events of the Haymarket tragedy with the fine hand of a novelist. The book is rich in plot development and thick characterization, and its interpretations and drama leave the reader both informed and drained."—*The San Diego Union-Tribune*"Absorbing. . . . Green . . . brings this tale to vivid life [and] does a wonderful job of delineating the cross currents of labor, capital, politics, and terrorism. . . . fascinating and deeply American."—*The Boston Globe*"It tells the tale with extraordinary grace. Its simplicity of expression carries an understated dramatic charge that stays with you long after finishing."—*The Nation*

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