

AFD Ep 323 Links and Notes - The Pinkertons, Part 1

[Bill] -- *"Inventing the Pinkertons - or Spies Sleuths Mercenaries and Thugs (Being the story of the nation's most famous (or infamous) detective agency"* by S. Paul O'Hara, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016

- From the intro:
 - Pinkertons hired by Chicago industrialists to infiltrate anarchists provided critical testimony to falsely convict people for instigating the Haymarket bombing, but Gov. Altgeld (discussed on episode 316) pardoned the not-yet-executed convicts on the basis that the Pinkertons actually caused the violent clashes at Haymarket. Between the time of the executions in 1887 and the Altgeld pardons in 1893, public opinion had begun to shift on the Pinkertons due to their brutal anti-worker actions at the Homestead strike of 1892 in Pennsylvania (which we discussed in episode 225, I think)
 - In addition to private contracts for the capitalists, they were repeatedly hired by the US government or other lower levels of government to perform state functions (including with the Post Office and Treasury Departments) and to wield the government's delegated monopoly on violence before that delegation of power was withdrawn in the Progressive Era
 - Many countries around the world during the same period were creating national police forces but the United States simply outsourced this role to the Pinkertons
 - "...the American public understood these conspiracies as threats because Pinkerton agents held the power to define threats to society. To challenge the Pinkertons was not only an act of defiance toward capitalism, progress, and industrial order but also a criminal act." (p.4)
 - "If corporate managers were the 'visible hand' of the market, the Pinkertons were the market's visible fist; they were the shock troops of industrial order." (p.9)
"...between 1870 and 1937, they were the most visible element of capital's transformation and domination. They were the power and violence of capitalism at its most naked. If there were a single 'chattel principle' to nineteenth-century industrialization, it would be this: industrialists had the power to kill their workers. Dangerous working conditions, starvation wages, the testimony of detectives, or the force of hired gunmen were all symbols of this power." (p.11)
- From the infiltration chapter:
 - Allan Pinkerton pivoted during the 1877 railroad strike (which we discussed in episode 315) from his longstanding contention that criminal conspiracies basically did not exist (apart from the Mollie Maguires infiltration operation begun in 1873) and were merely public paranoia to saying that they definitely did exist and only the Pinkerton Agency could stop them. This reflected a serious financial problem the company had reached by 1876 and their success with the Mollie Maguires, who also may not have existed.
 - After the strike of 1877, rich elites in major cities like Chicago began purchasing significant caches of arms to donate to newly emerging police forces as well as to state militias, and they began hiring the Pinkertons more routinely to infiltrate leftist labor organizations
 - Allan Pinkerton published an 1878 report on the strike that insisted that "strikers, tramps, [and] communists," were manipulating the working class into forming violent secret society labor unions with an ideology of European communism all across the nation's manufacturing communities in an "infection" that had to be

stopped like any other disease. He did not acknowledge the material triggers of the strike that we covered in the episode on the strike.

- Pinkerton also insisted that the Knights of Labor was a merger of the Mollie Maguires and exiled Paris communards.
- From the Private Army of Capital chapter:
 - One reason the federal government eventually rolled back the broad powers it had delegated or subcontracted to the Pinkertons was because the Progressive economic policy was hostile to monopoly corporations and that was the other big source of Pinkerton contracts. They could not work for both the state and capital once those two fell out of full alignment.
 - Beginning in 1884 during a strike of coal miners in the Hocking Valley region of Ohio, Pinkerton detectives began to take on their new role as the armed protection details for scab workers brought in to break the strike, which led them into violent clashes with the striking workers. By 1888, the Pinkertons had expanded their services to directly providing the scab workers as well.
 - “Between 1877 and 1892, the Pinkertons took an active part in at least seventy different strikes.” (p.76)
 - In repeated incidents, verbal provocations by strikers toward armed Pinkertons resulted in the Pinkertons firing lethally into unarmed crowds. Newspapers and courts tended to hand-wave away eyewitness testimony as being biased against the Pinkertons specifically, even when other investigating authorities such as coroners argued that they were definitely at fault.
 - In 1887, when they shot a teenager in New Jersey who just happened to be there, the local police chief persuaded the contracting company to remove the Pinkertons from the situation, given public outcry. The United Labor Party denounced the shadowy quasi-governmental role of the Pinkertons and said “Pinkerton men go from state to state committing murders for which none of them are ever brought to trial.” (p.78) The Federation of Organized Trades also denounced them by name. And a State Trades Assembly in New Jersey called them an “army of Hessian murderers” in reference to the Hessian mercenaries of the British Army during the Revolution, deployed to New Jersey, which became a popular metaphor for them. The same assembly said the riches and power of industrialists “had made them so arrogant that it is only a question of a short time when each one of them will become a feudal lord with his own private department of murder.” (p.78)
 - The Knights of Labor argued that the armed Pinkertons tended to inflame situations “just as a red flag acts on a bull.” (p.78)
 - A common thread throughout the book is how favorable toward the Pinkertons major newspapers were and how absurdly dismissive they were of any worker objections (or even politician and law enforcement objections) toward the Pinkertons
 - The 1890 New York Central strike started with a very conscientious effort by the Knights of Labor to keep things peaceful to shake off their growing public reputation of being associated with worker violence (a reputation largely linked to agitation and attacks by Pinkertons in earlier strikes), and within weeks it had devolved into gunfire on both sides.

- However, newspapers this time (apart from the continually pro-Pinkerton New York Times) tended to use the phrase “Pinkerton Roughs” and ascribe blame to their violent intervention. Local police attempted to remove or even arrest Pinkerton shooters and the Pinkertons refused to allow this and beat an officer.
- Workers also alleged that Pinkertons were engaging in sabotage of railroad property to make the Knights of Labor look bad, while the Knights continued to urge calm and non-violence as well as not engaging with the Pinkertons to try to bolster their reputation. The Knights even urged workers not to joke about taking more violent action because Pinkerton spies might overhear and have them convicted on false charges.
- The Knights of Labor also began a fierce public relations campaign to win over newspapers to the workers and against the Pinkertons, even going as far as to suggest that Pinkertons had a clear financial incentive to create violent chaos because it would get them more and longer contracts.
- The Pinkertons contended to industrialists that “all capital so invested is practically at the mercy of secret labor organization, whose tyranny and despotism exceed anything ever known in the history of the world.” (p.85) The Knights responded by arguing that “Their existence as a detective agency depends upon their detecting something. In order to prevent the occupations from vanishing, [they] conjure up the imaginary where the real would not answer their purpose.” (p.86). “There exists no necessity whatever for the existence of a wandering army of vagabonds raked together from the four quarters of the earth, to engage in labor disputes. Capital makes a mistake in engaging these vagrants.” (p.86)
- Although the strike ended in deep failure for the Knights, particularly when other rail workers in different unions refused to join the strike in solidarity, state officials in New York were at the very least persuaded that the Pinkertons had probably made the situation worse and that it might be appropriate for the state to step in once and a while to mediate strikes instead of letting them be resolved by uncontrolled private force.
- The Homestead Strike chapter
 - The Homestead strike conduct by the Pinkertons sharply turned much of public and media opinion against the agency. The American Journal of Politics expressed bewilderment that the workers had been charged with “treason” for their shootout with the Pinkertons who were hired by the manager of the steel mill and were not working on behalf of the government. (As a side note: Nobody on either side of the shootout ended up being convicted of anything including murder.) Another writer expressed consternation that “millionaires are permitted to hire and drill the scum of society to shoot down workers.” (p.91)

- An increasing number of national-level politicians began to worry after Homestead that if Pinkerton thugs regularly inspired armed worker self-defense it would inevitably lead to civil war
 - Congress convened an investigation not just into Homestead but into the broader questions about whether or not an armed private security force should be allowed to operate unregulated and whether or not local law enforcement was right to deputize them to act for the government too. Law enforcement testimony was split between those who openly believed the Pinkertons exacerbated situations and those who believed that the working classes could only be contained by the explicit fear of the Pinkertons' willingness to use deadly force with little provocation
 - The House report included a majority and minority report. The majority report called Pinkertons a "mercenary private police force" that "may properly be characterized as a sort of private military or police force" and "produce irritation among the strikers frequently resulting in hostile demonstrations and bloodshed." The minority report stated that "Pinkertons have grown to undue and in some degree menacing proportions...with its officers, corps of drilled men and supply of arms it is the nature of a military force under the control of private individuals to be hired out to whomever may be able and willing to engage it." (p.103)
 - The Senate findings suggested that the mere fact of the now constant reliance on armed Pinkertons demonstrated the state was unable to maintain order when necessary and that if that was true then the country was basically in a state of anarchy. Senator John Palmer of Illinois denounced Pinkertons as "enemies to mankind that ought to be hunted down" (pp.103-104)
 - Congress was uncertain as to whether or not it could federally ban the use of armed Pinkertons nationwide under constitutional powers interpretations present at the time but it did pass the first anti-Pinkerton law banning federal agencies from outsourcing to the Pinkertons as well as banning them in the District of Columbia. However, this was enough of a green light for 23 states to pass their own state level laws shortly after.
- Even the pro-Pinkerton New York Times began to raise questions after the disastrous battle at the Homestead Strike, alleging that the Pinkerton's "reserve" force of armed guards were generally forcibly recruited for specific incidents from among known criminals that the Pinkertons monitored and tracked. The Times also observed that generally after each labor clash, some state legislators in every state had attempted to ban the use of these mercenaries but the Pinkertons had always managed to stop the bills from passing. The Times also was willing to print a quote by Samuel Gompers of the AFL attributing the violence at Homestead to the Pinkertons and denouncing the private mercenary force as "contrary to all American principles and ideas." (pp.96-97) Harper's Weekly said "when such an agency ... also furnishes armed bodies of men for the defence of factories or railroad shops in case of trouble between employers and working-men, it assumes a different character: It becomes, in a large sense, a private military organization, keeping itself in a state of readiness to call into active service at short notice. It has a standing corps of experienced officers –

captains and lieutenants – and a body of trained privates large enough to form the nucleus of a little army.” (p.97)

- Some members of organized labor however immediately recognized that the real legacy of the Homestead strike was not the fall from grace and power of the Pinkertons but the rise of the state militias as an explicit anti-labor force for capital in their place. This had happened at Homestead but the wave of anti-Pinkerton laws that followed essentially cemented this new function.

[Rachel on modern iteration and modern strikebreaking]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Securitas_AB

In February 1999, Securitas acquired [Pinkerton](#),^[9] and in August 2000, [Burns Security](#),^[10] and several regional security companies in the [United States](#). These acquisitions made Securitas one of the largest [security](#) companies in the world. In 2001, a new organization took effect, with five business areas according to types of services offered, and [Loomis Fargo & Company](#) was acquired.

In 2013, Securitas acquired Pinkerton Government Services, which provides cleared security services to governmental agencies and programs that require a [Department of Defense](#) or [Department of Energy security clearance](#). This government services division of Securitas became known as Securitas Critical Infrastructure Services. This division operates both in the United States and worldwide when cleared services are needed overseas.

Specialized services including [due diligence](#), [background checks](#), security assessments, [brand protection](#), [intellectual property protection](#), [executive protection](#), [investigations](#), [cyber surveillance](#), [computer forensics](#), social compliance and [IT security](#) are performed worldwide under the [brand](#) "Pinkerton."

<https://newrepublic.com/article/147619/pinkertons-still-never-sleep> (2018)

CWA struck against Frontier Communications in WV and VA

“Frontier has alleged that some of its cables have been cut with an axe or shot with a shotgun, and that striking workers have driven “recklessly” around work sites. The Associated Press [reported on Tuesday](#) that Frontier has offered a reward of \$10,000 for information about the identity of the vandals, and the company took out a temporary injunction that it said it needed to keep the strike peaceful. In Frontier’s legal complaint was the news that the company was employing Pinkerton Consulting & Investigations for “security services,” and that the Pinkertons claimed that striking workers had “abused” them, according to the [West Virginia Gazette-Mail](#). Workers dispute Frontier’s accusations. In fact, a scab committed the strike’s only threat of violence when [he pulled out a gun](#) to intimidate strikers.”

The Pinkertons survived, and entered the 21st century intact largely on the strength of their ability to intimidate, surveil, and gather intelligence about workers. On its website, the company (which was bought by Securitas USA, a Swedish security company, for \$384 million in 1999) advertises “global protective intelligence” produced in part by agents who are “embedded or on-call.” Corporate clients can access the Pinkerton Vigilance Network, which consists of the firm’s agents, government agencies, and “+1,000 private sources.” The goal is to help corporations manage risk on all fronts, from natural disasters to political events.

Pinkerton’s hardly the only firm to advertise such services. But its history sets it apart, and the company embraces its legacy. “With one call to Pinkerton you gain access to our global network of resources, providing ‘boots on the ground’ when and where you need them,” it promises. A

Securitas ad for the firm lists “labor demonstrations” among the risks it can monitor. “Trouble can happen anywhere, anytime,” a narrator intones.