

## Evidence 9: Burning of the Union Depot and Hotel in Pittsburgh, 11 August 1877



### Introduction

The August 11 issue of *Harper's Weekly* also featured several illustrations of the conflagration at Pittsburgh, the western terminus of the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line and the starting point for the company's major branch lines. The strike there began on July 19, three days after the B & O strike, when workers stopped the trains and kept others from taking their places. Pittsburgh citizens, who resented the railroad's power over their community, generally supported the striking workers, and the local militia troops initially sent in to quell the disturbance and get the trains running again refused to intervene. City officials then called for the Philadelphia militia, which was greeted by a large crowd of men, women, and children taunting them. Soon after their arrival, the troops were ordered to fix bayonets and charge the growing crowd. The resulting bloodshed angered the assembled Pittsburgh residents, who began throwing stones at the troops. The Philadelphia militia then opened fire in what a grand jury later described as "an unauthorized, willful and wanton killing. . . which the inquest can call by no other name than murder" (Foner, 63). Within a few minutes, at least 20 people were dead, including a woman and three small children, while more than twenty-nine were wounded.

The enraged crowd forced the Philadelphia militia into a roundhouse and began torching company property, including the railroad's Union Depot and Hotel. When fire fighters attempted to respond to alarm bells, swarms of people blocked their engines. Before the fires burned themselves out, some 39 buildings, 104 engines, and over 1,200 freight cars went up in flames.

### Questions to Consider

- What impact was the picture below likely to have on viewers?
- Does the choice of this particular image reveal anything about the editor's opinion of the strike?

### Document



Source:

*Harper's Weekly*, 11 August 1877, 621.