The Making Of American Exceptionalism: The Knights Of Labor And Class Formation In The Nineteenth Century

Kim Voss
Kim Voss rejects traditional interpretations—theories of "American exceptionalism"—which attribute this distinctiveness to inherent characteristics of American society. On the contrary, she demonstrates, the American labor movement had much in common with its English and French counterparts for most of the nineteenth century. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of many features that we today associate with "American exceptionalism." In the mid-1870s the American labor movement did not differ significantly from labor movements in England and France, two countries at roughly the same stage of capitalist development. All were primarily movements of skilled craft workers, all shared broad similarities in rhetoric and behavior. By the early twentieth century, however, the American labor movement had begun to stand apart. Whereas workers in France and England had incorporated less-skilled wage earners. The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993. Weir, Robert E. An American labor union, the Knights of Labor organization was founded in 1869 as a secretive fraternal society (the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A garment worker Uriah Stephens (1821–1882) and several of his colleagues banded together and opened membership to anyone except physicians, lawyers, bankers, professional gamblers, stockbrokers, and liquor dealers.