



Grand Master Workman: Terence Powderly and the Knights of Labor (Contributions in Labor Studies)

Craig Phelan

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The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was the most ambitious and significant labor organization of the Gilded Age. As the charismatic leader of this group, Terence Powderly was America's first nationally known labor leader, the first to achieve a high degree of recognition from working people, industrialists, and politicians across the continent. To most Americans, Powderly *was* the Knights of Labor. Based on an exhaustive examination of Powderly's voluminous correspondence, this book offers a critical analysis of Powderly's efforts to oversee the most spectacular experiment in class-wide solidarity ever undertaken.

Phelan paints a sympathetic and probing portrait of a complex figure caught up in the whirlwind of local and national events. He details the challenges and pressures of labor leadership at a time when industrialization was convulsing the nation, and when the labor movement was struggling to build a viable national institution capable of creating a more egalitarian society. The national focus of this study helps to synthesize the numerous community studies written on the Knights in recent years and offers fresh perspectives on the ultimate meaning of the organization. It is the first detailed examination of the Knights' leadership since the Powderly and Hayes Papers have become available.

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