ACTS OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IN AMERICAN HISTORY: SELECTED EXAMPLES

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In the following report, civil disobedience does not mean every violation of law, but every act of disobedience to law intended, not merely for private advantage, but primarily for the purpose of changing public law or policy.

The report contains the following examples of civil disobedience:

Resistance to Writs of Assistance (1761);
Resistance to the Stamp Act (1765);
Resistance to Billeting of Troops (1768);
The Regulators (1771);
The Burning of the Gaspe (1772);
Destruction of Tea Shipments (1773);
Resistance to the Boston Port Bill (1774);
Revolt Against North Carolina (1784);
Shay's Rebellion (1786);
The Whiskey Rebellion (1794);
The Virginia and Kentucky Resolution (1798-9);
Demonstrations Against the Jay Treaty (1795);
The Fries Rebellion (1799);
Resistance to the Embargo Act (1808-9);
Tariff Nullification (1832);
The Dorr Rebellion (1842);
Thoreau (1846);
San Francisco Committee of Vigilance (1851);
Underground Railroad (prior to Civil War);
Burns Fugitive Slave Case (1854);
Struggle in Kansas Over Slavery (1854-5);
Capture of Harpers Ferry (1859);
Ku-Klux Klan (1866-9);
Labor Strikes of 1877;
The Homestead Strike (1892);
Coxey's Army of the Commonweal (1894);
The Pullman Strike (1893);
The "Ludlow Massacre" (1913-14);
Protest March of West Virginia Coal Miners (1921);
The Bonus Army (1932);
United Auto Workers' Occupation of General Motors Plants at Flint, Michigan (1936-7);
Sit-Ins (1960);
Birmingham Demonstrations (1963);
Brooklyn Demonstration for Nondiscrimination in Employment (1963);
Attempted March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama (1965);
Burning of Draft Cards (1965);
Mission to Hanoi (1965).

Resistance to Writs of Assistance (1761)

As a means of enforcing the Importation Act of 1733, which placed heavy duties on products of the West Indies imported to the American Colonies, crown officers in Boston in 1760 directed the head of customs to apply to the Supreme Court of the Province for "writs of assistance" authorizing customs officers to enter and search any place where they suspected that goods imported without payment of duty were stored.

James Otis, in 1761, on behalf of the merchants of Salem and Boston, argued in court against the writs. He stated that the British Constitution permitted issuance only of special warrants authorizing search of particular places upon sworn complaint, but not general warrants giving full discretion to officials. Such a warrant, Otis said, "is a power, that places the liberty of every man in the hands of every petty officer."

John Adams said of Otis' Speech: "American independence was then and there born."
Resistance through judicial process to the issuance of writs of assistance can be cited as an act bordering, at least, upon civil disobedience, because it is probable (and Gridley, attorney for the Crown, so argued) that the issuance of such writs was authorized by statutes enacted by Parliament, and because, under the British Constitution, Parliament is supreme and its acts are not subject to judicial review (George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1937 ed., p. 453-4, 489-90).

The court delayed decision until the following term. It apparently issued the writs, but customs officers never dared use them against any private citizens.

**References:**


**Resistance to The Stamp Act (1765)**

Parliament, in 1765, passed an act requiring that every legal document in the American Colonies bear a stamp sold by the British Government. Without a stamp, rights and duties specified by a document could not be adjudicated in court.

Americans opposed taxation by a legislature in which they had no representation. Thousands of people in New York City joined a protest march. They carried a copy of the Stamp Act with a death's head, and a placard with the words: "The folly of England and the ruin of America." People rioted in other colonies, and officials authorized to administer the Act resigned.
Representatives of the Colonies convened in the "Stamp Act Congress" in New York later in the same year. They issued a "Declaration of Rights," a "Petition to the King," and a "Memorial to both Houses of Parliament."

By consequence of American resistance, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act in 1766.

Reference:

**Resistance to Billeting of Troops (1768)**

As a means of enforcing acts of Parliament, General Gage, Governor of Massachusetts, in 1768, brought two regiments of British soldiers from Halifax into Boston and ordered the people to quarter them in their homes. The people refused to do so, but permitted the troops to spend their first night in Faneuil Hall because of the cold.

Reference:

**The Regulators (1771)**

Men of North Carolina joined together in a group called "the Regulators" in order to resist taxation by any authority other than their own legislature.

In May, 1771, the Regulators forcibly released a man from prison at New Berne and shortly afterward engaged the troops of Governor Tryon at Alamance Creek. This battle may be considered the first of the Revolutionary War.

Reference:
The Burning of the Gaspe (1772)

The customs officers of Boston sent the British armed schooner, the Gaspe, into Narragansett Bay in order to enforce the revenue laws. Lieutenant Dudingston, in command of the schooner, refused to show his authorization to the representative of Governor Wanton of Rhode Island. In June, 1772, a number of persons took possession of the Gaspe, removed the crew, and set her on fire. After hours of burning, the schooner exploded.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 410-12.

Destruction of Tea Shipments (1773)

Determined to vindicate the principle that subjects should not be taxed unless they are represented in the legislature which votes the taxes, citizens of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston prevented the marketing by the East India Company of tea upon which Parliament had imposed a tax. Citizens of New York and Philadelphia forced ships carrying tea to their ports to return to England without unloading. People of Charleston stored tea in cellars so that it would be destroyed by dampness. Men of Boston boarded three East India Company ships on the night of December 16, 1773, and emptied 342 chests of tea into the ocean.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 412-14.
Resistance to the Boston Port Bill (1774)

Shortly after the "Boston Tea Party," Parliament passed a law closing off from trade the Port of Boston until its citizens had paid for the tea thrown overboard. Other acts of Parliament nullified the colonial government of Massachusetts, forbade citizens to assemble to discuss public issues, and provided for trial outside Massachusetts of persons charged with murder, which was of advantage to agents of the Crown who might commit murder in enforcing law.

On September 6, 1774, delegates from every town in the county which included Boston notified General Gage, Governor of Massachusetts, that they would not yield to punitive legislation. They determined to take as hostage any crown official in case any person should be arrested for a political reason.

On September 5, 1774, the First Continental Congress adopted the following resolution:

"That this Congress approve the opposition of the inhabitants of Massachusetts Bay to the execution of the late acts of Parliament; and if the same shall be attempted to be carried into execution by force, in such case all America ought to support them in their opposition."

Congress followed up this resolution with a Declaration of Colonial Rights stating that the punitive acts of Parliament violated the rights of colonists, and with an agreement whereby all the colonies
joined together in a commercial boycott of Great Britain, Ireland, the West Indies, and Madeira.

General Gage called the Massachusetts Assembly to convene at Salem on October 5, 1774, to consider the acts of Parliament, but then withdrew his call. Ninety of the members claimed that he had no right to forbid their convening, and resolved themselves into a provincial Congress at Concord. This Congress protested to the Governor against the acts of Parliament and against the fortification of Boston Neck, which they regarded as a means of coercion.

Reference:
Ibid., 414-19.

Revolt Against North Carolina (1784)

Settlers in the western parts of the seaboard States during the period of Confederation found themselves in a situation similar to that of the colonists with respect to Britain. The State legislatures exercised jurisdiction from a great distance, and lacked knowledge of frontier conditions, while eastern speculators excluded settlers from large areas of western land. County governments in the West did not afford settlers the degree of self-government which they wished.

The Ordinance of 1784, which never went into effect, provided for independence from seaboard States of western areas and limited self-government for the time being, and proposed eventual statehood.
North Carolina made a bid to Congress in 1784 to cede to it the western part of the State. Congress did not agree to the terms of the offer, but the inhabitants of western North Carolina declared themselves independent of the State in August of that year, and constituted themselves the State of Franklin. John Sevier, governor, and the other officials of Franklin refused to submit to North Carolina's claim of jurisdiction. During the next four years, both North Carolina and Franklin exercised jurisdiction in the seven counties of the area. Every man was free to choose the government to which he would pay taxes.

References:

Ibid., p. 581-2.

Shay's Rebellion (1786)

In order to stabilize the value of paper currency, Congress in 1781 chartered the Bank of North America. The Bank maintained the value of currency by issuing paper tender only on the basis of its specie reserve.

Scarcity of specie and appreciated paper currency, together with a fall in prices, increased the real value of debts.

The debtor class in many States was unable to render debt payments more equitable by legislative process because suffrage requirements and apportionment of State legislatures usually assured conservative creditors more effective representation.
It was in such an economic and political context that the courts enforced obligations of contract.

Debtors combined into political parties in order to gain political power and issue depreciated paper currency.

The paper-money party in Massachusetts was defeated in its bid for power in 1786. Western farmers in the State, led by Daniel Shays, who had fought at Bunker Hill, rose in armed rebellion. They put a stop to trials for debt by courts in Northampton and Worcester, and besieged Springfield in an attempt to capture the Federal arsenal. State militia dispersed the rebels, but the popularity of their cause saved them from prosecution.

References:

The Whiskey Rebellion (1794)

Transportation of grain across the mountains of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia was so difficult that many farmers in the western parts of these States found it more profitable to turn their grain into whiskey for sale on the eastern seaboard.

A Federal excise tax levied on whiskey during Washington's Administration gave rise to fierce opposition by whiskey distillers. The whiskey makers encouraged each other to resistance and threatened the persons and property of tax collectors.
In 1794, courts issued warrants for the arrest of the leaders of the resistance movement. Violence ensued, and overt rebellion seemed imminent.

President Washington, determined to vindicate the authority of the Federal Government, sent fifteen thousand troops to suppress resistance to the revenue law. Two of the leaders of the rebellion were tried, convicted of treason, and pardoned.

References:
Ibid., p. 317-19.

The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions (1798-9)

In reaction to the supposed threat of French Jacobinism both from abroad and from within, Federalists in Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798.

The Alien Act empowered the President to order any alien to leave the country, on penalty of imprisonment for refusing, whom he considered dangerous to the public peace. The Act also increased the residence required for naturalization from five to fourteen years.

The Sedition Act forbade conspiracies to disobey Federal authority, and insurrection. More than this, the Act forbade anyone, on penalty of fine and imprisonment, to write, print, or make any statement which is "false, scandalous, and malicious" and which is "against the government of the United States, or either house of the Congress of the United States, or the President of the United States, with intent to defame...or to bring them...into contempt or disrepute."
The Sedition Act was fiercely opposed as a violation of First-Amendment guarantees of speech, press, and assembly.

Ten persons were convicted under the Sedition Act, most notably Dr. Thomas Cooper, afterward president of the College of South Carolina. For stating that President Adams was incompetent and had interfered with the course of justice, Dr. Cooper was sentenced to six months in prison and a $400 fine.

The Virginia House of Delegates passed a resolution, drafted by James Madison, in 1798, protesting against the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Kentucky House of Representatives passed a similar resolution, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, the following year.

The Virginia Resolution contended that the Alien Act confers a power not delegated to the Federal Government by the Constitution, and gives legislative and judicial powers to the executive branch. The Resolution protested against the Sedition Act as a violation of rights guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Both the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions presumed that Federal powers are delegated to the United States Government by the States through a compact to which the States are parties. The Virginia Resolution called for interposition of States' authority to prevent execution of the Acts in violation of States' rights or private rights. The Kentucky Resolution urged that the States exercise their authority to nullify execution of the Acts.

References:
Demonstrations Against the Jay Treaty (1795)

Congress, in 1794, sent Chief Justice John Jay to London as Minister Plenipotentiary to negotiate resolution of issues left unsettled by the Treaty of 1783, which terminated the Revolutionary War, as well as the issue of British violations of American rights at sea. Major issues were:

1. continued British occupation of six forts within the United States along the boundaries set by the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes;
2. resistance of American courts to payment of prewar debts to British creditors;
3. confiscation by the States of property belonging to persons who had remained loyal to the Crown and who wished to return to their homes;
4. boundary disputes;
5. capture of neutral American ships in execution of British naval orders of 1793 issued in pursuance of the war against France which began in the same year.

Jay signed a treaty on November 19, 1794, which included the following provisions:

1. evacuation of British troops from the northern forts by June 1, 1796;
2. guarantee by the United States of payment of prewar debts to British creditors;
3. boundary commissions to establish northern boundaries;
4. a commission to adjudicate claims by American ship owners;
5. acceptance by the United States of British naval orders for the duration of the war between Britain and France.
Protest against the treaty was intense. Jay was burned or hung in effigy by masses of protestors in New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah. Mass disorder and rioting occurred in Boston in September, 1795.

References:


The Fries Rebellion (1799)

As a means of raising additional revenue to strengthen the armed forces in preparation for a possible war with France, Congress authorized President Adams in 1798 to raise two million dollars by a direct tax on private property—"Lands and Dwelling Houses."

Residents of Bucks and Northampton Counties in Pennsylvania resisted Federal assessment of property.

Men of Quakerstown, Bucks County, led by John Fries, made prisoners of the assessors who attempted to execute the law in 1799.

The Rebels released the assessors, but women poured scalding water on some of them when they were busy evaluating property.

A group of 50 confronted the Federal Collector of Revenue at Millerstown, Northampton County, and prevented the assessors from doing their duty.

A United States District Court issued warrants for the arrest of a number of men in Northampton County. About 100 men, led by Fries,
demonstrated in front of the inn where 18 prisoners were assembled with the Federal Marshal and a posse comitatus of 14 men. The prisoners were released under threat of violence, and the rebels dispersed.

Federal troops despatched by President Adams suppressed resistance to the tax. Fries and others were arrested, tried twice, twice convicted of treason, and pardoned.

References:

Resistance to the Embargo Act (1808-9)

The Embargo Act of 1808 was an attempt to exert economic pressure on Britain and France, at war with each other, so as to make them respect the rights of neutral, American merchant ships. The Act forbade American ships to sail abroad. A supplementary Act of the same year forbade exportation of American commodities by land or inland waterways.

The New England States and New York suffered far more than Britain or France.

Federal troops, State militia, and Federal gunboats were unable to suppress the widespread violations of the Act. So strong was opposition to the Embargo that Congress repealed the Act in March 1809.

References:
Tariff Nullification (1832)

The protective tariff of 1816 was regarded by the southern States as a temporary measure to protect new manufacturers in northern States from a "sudden influx" of foreign manufactures with the end of war. Successive tariff acts of 1820, 1824, 1828, and 1832 convinced Southerners that protection of northern manufacturing at the expense of southern planters had become a permanent Federal policy. Southerners argued that the tariff was both inequitable and unconstitutional, inasmuch as it was a regulation of manufacturing beyond the powers delegated by the States to the Federal Government.

In October, 1832, the South Carolina Legislature called for a State convention to consider the tariff issue. The Convention, through its "Committee of Twenty-One," issued on November 24 the Ordinance of Nullification, whereby South Carolina declared the Tariff Act null and void within the State.

Governor Hamilton asked the Legislature to authorize the mobilization of volunteers and of a State Guard, and to authorize the Governor to order that Federal troops evacuate the Citadel of Charleston. His successor, Governor Hayne, undertook to enroll 10,000 volunteers and called upon South Carolinians to "protect the liberties of the State."

The Legislature required all officers of the State to uphold the Ordinance of Nullification, provided for judicial process for recovery of goods seized and held for payment of duty by Federal officers, and authorized sheriffs to seize from Federal officers goods of twice the
value of those seized in case the orders of State courts for recovery of goods could not be enforced.

President Jackson prepared to ensure execution of the revenue law in South Carolina by means of military force.

On February 26, 1833, Congress passed a compromise tariff act urged by Henry Clay. A report to the South Carolina Convention the following month cited the act as a "beneficial modification" of the Tariff Act of 1832, and the Convention rescinded the Ordinance of Nullification.

References:

The Dorr Rebellion (1842)

In reaction to a State Constitution which provided for legislative apportionment disproportionate to respective numbers of people in different towns and which severely restricted the franchise to property owners, many people in Rhode Island, without legal authorization, held a constitutional convention in November 1841. The People's constitution, which provided for universal, male suffrage, was adopted by a majority of voters in an illegal referendum the following month. In April 1842, Thomas Dorr was elected governor under the new Constitution, and Samuel King was elected governor under the existing Constitution.

Dorr, and those elected as representatives under the People's Constitution, attempted to organize a government. The legislature elected under the existing Constitution declared a state of insurrection.
Dorr made a show of force with volunteers, but, confronted by the State militia and seeing that he lacked sufficient popular support to maintain his claim by force, Dorr discharged his volunteers and left the State.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 54-64.

Thoreau (1846)

In 1846 Henry David Thoreau refused to pay a Massachusetts poll tax. He regarded the State as representing the Federal Government, and he decided to "refuse allegiance" to the State, because he regarded both slavery and the Mexican War unjust. He was imprisoned overnight—his family paid his tax the next day and he was released.

References:
Thoreau, Henry David. *Civil Disobedience*.

San Francisco Committee of Vigilance (1851)

During the 1850's, impotence or corruption of San Francisco County government made possible the advent of criminal disorder.

The San Francisco Vigilance Committee was organized in 1851 and for several years exercised the powers of government in order to establish security of person and property.

Reference:
Underground Railroad (prior to Civil War)

"Underground Railroad, a term used properly to designate an organized system existing in the northern states of the United States prior to the Civil War by which slaves were secretly helped by sympathetic northerners and in defiance of the Fugitive Slave laws [Federal Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850] to make their way to Canada, and thus to freedom. The name arose from the exaggerated use of railway terms in reference to the conduct of the system. Levi Coffin and Robert Purvis were the 'presidents' of the road. Various routes were known as 'lines,' stopping places were called 'stations,' those who aided along the stages of the route were 'conductors' and their charges were referred to as 'packages' or 'freight.' The system reached from Kentucky and Virginia across Ohio, and from Maryland across Pennsylvania and New York or New England. The Quakers of Pennsylvania perhaps initiated the system; the best known of them, Thomas Garrett (1789-1871), is said to have helped 2,700 slaves to freedom. One of the most picturesque conductors was Harriet Tubman, a Negro woman called 'General' Tubman by John Brown, and 'Moses' by her fellow Negroes, who made about a score of trips into the South, bringing out with her perhaps 300 Negroes altogether. Levi Coffin, a native of North Carolina, in 1826 settled at New Garden (now Fountain City), Ohio, where his home was the meeting point of three 'lines' from Kentucky. In 1847 he removed to Cincinnati, where he was even more successful in bringing out slaves. Estimates of the number of slaves who reached freedom through the system vary from 40,000 to 100,000."

Reference:
Burns Fugitive Slave Case (1854)

"Burns Fugitive Slave Case (1854) was one of three famous fugitive slave cases arising in Boston, Mass., after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Part of the Vigilance Committee (1850-61) planned to rescue Anthony Burns, an escaped slave, from an upper room of the courthouse. They battered in a door of the building at night, May 26, entered and one of them shot and killed Marshal Batchelder. Despite the committee's efforts, United States Commissioner Edward G. Loring remanded Burns to his owner, Suttle, of Alexandria, Va. On June 2 throngs witnessed the slave's departure. Several rich citizens paid $1,300 and got him back early in 1855."

Reference:

Struggle in Kansas Over Slavery (1854-5)

Repeal of the Missouri Compromise by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 opened the Kansas Territory to a struggle between pro-slavery men from Missouri and States farther South and Free Soil men from Massachusetts.

Governor Reeder of Kansas ordered elections for the Territorial legislature to be held on March 30, 1855. Armed men came over from Missouri on election day and took control of polling places in Kansas. They succeeded in producing a pro-slavery legislature. In response to protest against this intervention, the Governor ordered new elections in six districts, five of which thereafter returned Free-Soil representatives. The latter were denied their seats in the legislature, however,
and the pro-slavery men previously elected were seated. The legislature then removed itself to Shawnee Mission, on the Missouri border, and proceeded to enact the laws of Missouri as the laws of Kansas.

Free-Soil men comprised a majority of the Territory. In a convention on September 5, 1855, they refused recognition of the existing government and laws of the Territory, and called for a constitutional convention to meet at Topeka later in the month. The convention which met at Topeka on September 19 established another government (an executive committee) for the Territory, and adopted a State constitution excluding slavery from Kansas. This constitution they sent to Congress together with a petition that Kansas be admitted as a State.

Reference:

Capture of Harpers Ferry (1859)

In 1858, John Brown and his followers drew up a constitution for a free state to be formed out of Virginia and Maryland.

Brown proceeded to give effect to this plan in October, 1859, by leading a small force of 17 white men and five Negroes to capture the Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Va. (Now W. Va.). A company of U. S. Marines commanded by Col. Robert E. Lee assaulted Brown and his followers when the latter refused to surrender, and recaptured the Arsenal.
Brown was guilty of the Federal crime of seizing a U.S. arsenal, and of the crime against Virginia of conspiring to bring about an insurrection of slaves. He was tried in a State court on the latter charge, convicted, and hanged.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 655-7.

Draft Riots (1863)

"Draft Riots. Although there were minor disturbances connected with personal enrollments or 'Conscription' under the act of March 3, 1863, actual violence awaited the draft itself. Minor riots occurred in Rutland, Vt.; Wooster, Ohio; Boston, Mass.; and Portsmouth, N.H.; but none equaled in length or destructiveness those in New York City. Fanned by Democratic opposition to the war, indiscreet remarks by Gov. Horatio Seymour, and arguments alleging constitutional liberties, objection to the draft in New York rested chiefly on the provision for money payments in lieu of service (see Substitutes, Civil War), which distinguished between rich men's money and poor men's blood. Shortly after the drawing of lots commenced on July 13 at the Ninth Congressional District draft headquarters, a mob, mostly of foreign-born laborers, stormed the building, overpowered attendants, police, firemen and militia, attacked residences, other draft district headquarters, saloons, hotels and restaurants and even railway tracks, and for four days the city was a welter of conflagrations, assaults and defiances, costing a thousand casualties and $1,500,000 property loss.
On July 15 militia regiments sent toward Gettysburg began to return and order was restored. Picked troops from the Army of the Potomac were brought in and on Aug. 19 drawings proceeded peaceably."

Reference:

Ku-Klux Klan (1866-9)

Disfranchisement of southern white men during the Reconstruction period and the new elective power of Negroes secured by Federal troops brought about the political supremacy of Negroes, "carpetbaggers," and "scalawags." At the same time, the Republican Party attempted to gain Negro support in southern States through its organization, the Union League.

The Ku-Klux Klan was organized in May 1866, in Pulaski, Tenn.

"...Secret, the organization's objectives were to protect the white people from humiliation by Negroes and to open the way for the reassertion of the supremacy of the whites politically and socially.

"...One of their favorite practices was to ride out of woods, surprising Negroes walking home in the darkness from meetings of the Union League, an organization which sought to direct the Negroes' votes into the proper Republican channels. The Klan invariably rode at night.

"...The Klan also intimidated carpetbaggers and scalawags and played unseen influential roles in many trials in the South. It was responsible for floggings and lynchings in extreme circumstances."
The trying times led it into inexcusable acts on occasions. The Klan was formally disbanded in the spring of 1869, but it did not die."

Reference:

**Labor Strikes of 1877**

The business depression which began in 1873 reduced the income of railroad corporations. At the same time, the railroads engaged in severe competition in rate reduction. In order to offset losses resulting from decline in demand and from rate cutting, the corporations reduced wages. By the summer of 1877, wages had been reduced by about ten percent. Workingmen in several States went on strike.

Strikers in Martinsburg, West Virginia, took possession of the property of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in July 1877.

Riots in Pittsburgh in July 1877, resulted in severe loss of life and property. Later, State militia from Philadelphia were forced to retreat to the Pennsylvania Railroad roundhouse, where strikers fired at them and eventually burned them out. During July 21 and 22, 16 soldiers and 50 strikers were reportedly killed; more than 125 locomotives, 2,000 freight cars, the depot, and other property were destroyed.

In Chicago, rioters fought police on July 26; several persons were killed and many more were wounded.

Reference:
The Homestead Strike (1892)

"Homestead Strike of 1892, The, is regarded as a landmark not only in the development of labor organization in the steel industry, but in the general history of organized labor in America as well. The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers at this time was a powerful labor organization, which had established working relations with the Carnegie Company at Homestead [Pa.]. In 1892 negotiations with the company for a new agreement failed. A strike ensued in which the recognition of the union was the chief issue. Violence and disorder involving pitched battles between workers and a force of detectives were checked by the militia. The strike was lost. Thus, organized labor's first struggle with large-scale capital ended in a failure and, possibly, this is significant of the failure of unionism to penetrate the rising large-scale industries in later years."

Reference:

The Pullman Strike (1893)

By consequence of the depression of 1893, wages at the Pullman Palace Car Company, a manufacturer, were reduced 25 percent, while salaries of managers remained the same and dividends were increased. Company employees were members of the American Railway Union headed by Eugene V. Debs.

The Company refused to negotiate, whereupon the Pullman employees struck and other members of the Union refused to move Pullman cars.
A Federal court injunction was issued against Debs and the Union to prevent obstruction of interstate commerce and delivery of the mail. Violence broke out in Chicago. Freight cars were pushed over; other freight cars, as well as switches and railroad buildings, were destroyed. Twelve persons were killed.

Federal judicial process and the intervention of U.S. troops, deputy marshals, State militia, and police eventually suppressed disorder.

Debs and other Union leaders were convicted of contempt of court and sentenced to prison for terms of three to six months.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 91-107.

Coxey's Army of the Commonweal (1894)

In reaction to unemployment resulting from the depression of 1893, the J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association of the United States urged that Congress issue $500,000,000 of fiat money and spend it on highway improvement. In order to demonstrate for this legislative purpose, Coxey, in 1894, led a band of unemployed out of Massilon, Ohio, toward Washington, D.C.

Other groups soon undertook their own marches on the Capital as part of the "Army of the Commonweal."

In nine instances, at least, groups of unemployed men bound for Washington took possession of trains, in violation of private property rights and, in those cases in which railroads were in the hands of
receivers appointed by U.S. district courts, in violation of Federal court injunctions.

One group of Coxey's Army seized trains of the Northern Pacific at Butte. They resisted by force the preventive efforts of U.S. Marshals, but subsequently surrendered to Federal troops.

Only 300 of the Commonweal men reached Washington. They were arrested for walking on the grass.

Reference:

The "Ludlow Massacre" (1913-14)

The United Mine Workers attempted to organize the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company in the summer of 1913. The management refused to recognize the union, and several thousand employees with their families vacated company-owned homes and set up tent camps.

The miners armed themselves. The Company hired mine guards armed with machine guns, and contracted for the assistance of a detective agency.

The Colorado militia attempted but failed to disarm the contenders. The militia also prevented entry of strikebreakers until the company used its influence to end this measure. Sporadic violence occurred.

Several hundred workers at Ludlow fought to defend their tent camp on April 20, 1914, but were forced to flee. Deaths resulted on both sides. The tent camp was burned. Two women and eleven children
were suffocated to death in an underground shelter beneath the floor of one of the tents. Miners reacted violently to the outrage at Ludlow. Fifty persons or more were killed in the fight at Ludlow or in subsequent incidents.

Federal troops, intervening at the request of Governor Ammons, restored order. The United Mine Workers, at the urgent request of President Wilson, terminated the strike in November 1914.

The element of civil disobedience consisted in the attempt by contending parties to settle an issue of rights by their own physical force. Such a means of settlement belongs exclusively to government. But both strikers and mine guards refused to surrender their arms to the militia when ordered to do so by authority of the Governor.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 136-149.

Protest March of West Virginia Coal Miners (1921)

Following World War I, the United Mine Workers sought recognition as collective bargaining agent of the employees of West Virginia coal mine operators.

The miners protested coercion and abuse by armed guards and private detectives employed by the operators.

Violence broke out along the West Virginia-Kentucky line in May 1921. Governor Morgan of West Virginia, failing to receive the Federal assistance which he requested as a means of restoring order,
placed Mingo County under martial law. The UMW successfully contested this action: the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals held that martial law could not exist if enforced only by civil agencies. The Governor thereupon declared martial law for the County a second time, and called part of the militia to active duty to enforce it.

In order to protest the state of martial law, miners from the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek coal fields and other workers, an estimated 4,000 in all, undertook a march on August 25 through Boone and Logan Counties to Mingo County. The following day, they began to disperse at the request of Brigadier General Bandholtz of the U.S. Army. Pick-up trains were unfortunately delayed. Worse, State police intervened and violence occurred on the night of August 27. The miners regrouped along the Boone County line, confronting about 1,200 sheriffs' deputies, State police, and volunteers along the Logan County line. Both sides dispersed shortly after the arrival of Federal troops.

Reference:
Ibid., p. 158-166.

The Bonus Army (1932)

"Bonus Army, the. A spontaneous gathering of unemployed World War veterans who, late in May 1932, began marching and hitch-hiking to Washington in small groups from all over the United States until about 15,000 were assembled there. The needy veterans, seeking some economic relief from Congress, eventually united in petitioning for immediate payment of the Adjusted Compensation, or 'Bonus,' Certificates."
"The problems of food, shelter and sanitation for the impoverished veterans embarrassed Washington, and there was latent danger of disorder. But the leader, Walter W. Waters, maintained almost military discipline and expelled communistic agitators, while patriotism permeated the ranks. Though the chief of police, Gen. Glassford, tried to provide quarters, most of the men built wretched hovels in which they lived.

"In mid-June Congress, by a narrow margin, defeated the bonus bill, but the disappointed 'Bonus Expeditionary Force' stayed on, haunting the Capitol grounds. Late in July Glassford ordered the veterans to evacuate. They failed to do so and on July 28, by instructions from the President, United States troops drove them forcibly from their quarters in public buildings and from their camps."

Reference:

The United Auto Workers' Occupation of General Motors Plants at Flint, Michigan (1936-7)

On December 28, 1936, members of the United Auto Workers, CIO, took possession of Fisher Body (General Motors) Plant 2 at Flint, Mich., in an effort to make GM recognize their union as collective-bargaining agent. On January 4, 1937, GM refused again to accept the UAW, and rejected all other union demands. At the same time, the Corporation secured a court order enjoining strikers from occupying and picketing plants.
The strikers disregarded the injunction, and union men from Detroit, Cleveland, Toledo, and Akron went to Flint to aid the men inside the Fisher plant. On January 11, police intervened to prevent strikers outside from passing food to the strikers inside the Fisher plant. Police reportedly fired into the crowd of men, who returned fire with what they had at their disposal—stone, pieces of coal, steel hinges, milk bottles.

The UAW a short time later took possession of Chevrolet Plant 4 at Flint. They did so by means of a feigned assault on Chevrolet 9 in order to deceive informers and to divert the police. When a struggle between union men and company guards ensued at Chevrolet 9, other strikers moved in and occupied Plant 4.

On February 2, another injunction was issued ordering strikers to vacate the Fisher Plant.

Subsequently, upon the urging of President Roosevelt, GM recognized the UAW as collective bargaining agent, and injunction proceedings against strikers were dropped.

Reference:
Sit-Ins (1960)

On February 2, 1960, a number of Negro students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College sat down at the lunch counter in a Woolworth store in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. They continued to occupy seats at the counter after being refused service because of their race. They were protesting by their demonstrative action against customary policies of racial segregation which were then in effect throughout the South. These students intended to continue their "sit-in" until Negroes were served as a matter of policy at the lunch counter.

This was the first of numberless sit-ins in cities and towns throughout the South. These demonstrations achieved considerable success, both in opening previously segregated places to Negroes and in focusing national attention on the moral issue of racial segregation. Further sit-ins were rendered unnecessary by Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbids discrimination in privately owned places of public accommodation affecting interstate commerce.

Sit-ins were a form of "direct action" in violation of State or local trespass laws or ordinances meant to safeguard the right of owners to control their property.
Birmingham Demonstrations (1963)

In April 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led massive street demonstrations through Birmingham, Alabama, to press Negro demands for (1) new employment opportunities for Negroes, (2) desegregation of downtown lunch counters and public facilities, (3) establishment of a permanent biracial committee.

On April 10, 1963, an Alabama Circuit Court enjoined King in particular and others from conducting further demonstrations. King said: "We cannot in all good conscience obey such an injunction, which is unjust, undemocratic and unconstitutional misuse of the legal process..."

Demonstrations continued in violation of the injunction until an agreement was reached through Federal mediation on May 9.

Brooklyn Demonstration for Nondiscrimination in Employment (1963)

Following is a newspaper account of one of many similar demonstrations protesting against alleged racial discrimination in hiring in the construction industry.

"New York, July 22 (AP)—Police arrested 250 persons today when nearly 1,000 singing and chanting racial demonstrators massed at a Brooklyn construction site and blocked trucks from entering.

"A force of 200 mounted and foot patrolmen went into action at the site—the Downtown Medical Center—where 20 pickets were arrested last week."
"The pickets made no effort to prevent workmen from entering, but six of seven truck entrances were blocked. Police managed to reopen the seventh entrance more than three hours after the demonstration started.

"Pickets arrested lay prostrate in front of the entrances and had to be carried to patrol wagons. Other demonstrators then quickly took their places in the street.

"..."

"There was no violence and it was apparent police were taking pains to avoid trouble.

"Negro clergymen had urged 6,000 persons to take part in a drive to have 25 percent of the project's jobs given to Negroes. About three-fourths of the pickets were Negroes.

"One of the ministers, the Rev. Gardner C. Taylor, said he was well pleased with the demonstration.

"It shows Negroes above the Mason-Dixon Line also will protest for a just cause,' he told newsmen."


Attempted March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama (1965)

As a means of protesting alleged deprivation of voting rights on account of race in Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, John Lewis, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and other civil rights leaders led 1,500 persons out of Selma toward Montgomery on March 9, 1965. They returned peaceably to their headquarters in Selma when confronted by State troopers.
The march was undertaken in violation of an injunction issued shortly before by United States District Judge Frank M. Johnson, Jr. forbidding any such mass demonstration. It was undertaken also despite an urgent request from President Johnson that the civil rights leaders obey the Federal injunction. Prior to the march, Mr. Lewis made the following statement: "I understand there's an order from Judge Johnson. I believe we have a constitutional right to march when we get ready, injunction or no injunction."

Burning of Draft Cards (1965)

At a pacifist rally held at Union Square in New York City on November 6, 1965, four men burned their draft cards to protest United States military intervention in Vietnam. The four were indicted for violation of Federal law on December 22.

Mission to Hanoi (1965)

On December 19, 1965, Staughton Lynd, Yale Professor, Herbert Aptheker, American Communist theoretician, and Thomas Hayden, a founder of the organization, Students for a Democratic Society, travelled to Hanoi to confer with leaders of the Communist Government of North Vietnam regarding resolution of conflict. They did so without seeking State Department permission, which is required for travel to certain countries.