

FIRST LADY'S MESSAGE

Celebrating the American Worker

First Lady By: Mary Jane Grauso



America was built upon the shoulders of immigrants and the poor hard working men and women. They are the true backbone of this country. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for all of their blood, sweat, and sacrifice they gave to help make this country great. Hence in recognition of all of their efforts we celebrate Labor Day.

The **first Labor Day** holiday was celebrated on Tuesday, September 5, 1882, in New York City, in accordance with the plans of the Central Labor Union. Within 12 years, half the states in the country recognized Labor Day as a holiday. It is celebrated on the first Monday in September to honor and recognize the American labor movement and the works and contributions of laborers to the development and achievements of the United States.

It wasn't till the height of the Industrial Revolution the late 1800's when the average American worked 12 hour days 7 days a week. Children ages 5-6 worked in mills, factories and mines across the country. Very poor and recent immigrants worked in extremely unsafe working conditions, with insufficient access to fresh air, sanitary facilities and breaks.

As manufacturing supplanted agriculture as the American employment, labor unions became more prominent and vocal. They began organizing strikes and rallies to protest poor conditions and compel employers to renegotiate hours and pay. Many of these events turned violent during this period.

On May 11, 1894, employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company in Chicago went on strike to protest wage cuts and the firing of union representatives. On June 26, the American Railroad Union, called for a boycott of all Pullman railway cars, crippling railroad traffic nationwide. The federal government dispatched troops to Chicago to break up the strike, unleashing a wave of riots that resulted in the deaths of more than a dozen workers. In an attempt to repair ties with American workers, Congress passed an act making Labor Day a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories. It was signed into law on June 28, 1894, by President Grover Cleveland.

Unions are what made this country strong and what helped build the working middle class. **Today** and in the future, labor **unions** will continue to play an important role in our country's workforce and for the quality of life for working families.

