Thugs
Lakeside Chautauqua
July 12, 2016
What is a Thug?

“Thug” was a name applied to (usually paid) specialists in violent attacks and intimidation in the United States in the period after the Civil War. Thugs could be working on behalf of or against the interests of the state or economic elites.
In the period between the Civil War and First World War, Informal Violence Workers, who came to be called thugs, emerged not only as the chief challenge to the authority of nationalizing governmental and economic elites, but also as a crucial part of how they responded to these challenges. The Pinkertons were the most dramatic and organized example of elites’ reliance on non-state violence.
The Thuggee
Before the Thug: Antebellum Violence Specialists
1847 “The Soaplocks, or Bowery Boys
Bowery Boys/Dead Rabbits Riot 1857
Slave Patrols/ Beats
Reasons for the Rise of Thuggery
An Unequal Contest: Police v Disorder
DETECTIVE IN CHASE ON ROOF FALLS TO HIS DEATH.

Said He Was After a Thief — Leaped Over Air Shaft and Clutched a Chimney Pot, Which Collapsed.

While chasing a supposed thief across the roof of a five-story apartment house at 706 Ninth Avenue yesterday afternoon Edward Dolan, a Pinkerton detective, of 144 West End Avenue, fell down the air shaft between 696 and 698, receiving injuries which resulted in his death.

Detective Devinney of the West Forty-seventh Street Station was walking past the apartment house when he heard groans, and upon investigation discovered the hapless detective. He leaned over him, and the man told him who he was and where he lived. Between groans he informed Devinney that he had been chasing a thief across the roofs, and that in jumping from one roof to the other over the air shaft he had attempted to steady himself by taking hold of a chimney. The chimney pot crumbled with his weight, and he fell to the bottom of the shaft, part of the chimney going down with him.
Postwar Uses of Pro-Nationalization Thugs

- Gangs as Paid Political Muscle
- Informal Groups of Hired Armed Men
Rise of the Pinkertons

Incorporating the Thug
Pinkerton's National Detective Agency

"We never sleep."
Who Were the Pinkertons

- Often, underemployed men comfortable with violence work
- Poor community standing
• Rural
  • Bank Robbers, Train Robbers, Counterfeiters, Gangs

• Urban
  • Union infiltration, Strike Suppression
Chicago Fire Response

"Allen Pinkerton, who covets the distinction of being the leading detective in the world, had a right to come to the assistance of the regular police force with his subordinates; but to make a proclamation decreeing instant death to any class of offenders, or to undertake the enforcement of such a decree, was entirely out of the Pinkertonian province." (“Martial Law in Illinois” November 5, 1871, Daily Arkansas Gazette)
Pinkertons Escort Strikebreakers 1884
Battle of Homestead, July 6, 1892
Striking Workers on a Hill overlooking the Homestead Works
Homestead Workers Assault Captured Pinkertons
The importance of the ‘thug’, or private non-governmental violence worker to the consolidation of the modern state has not been fully appreciated. The process of political and economic nationalization was a seriously contested one, and the thug served as one of its key agents on the ground.