

## Table of Contents Volume 4 Number 1 Winter-Spring, 2004

<i>Social Studies Standards for What?</i> by Bill Bigelow with <i>Teacher Responses</i> .....	2
<b>Special Theme Section: Work and Workers in New Jersey and New York</b>	
<i>The Impact Of Containerization On Work On The New York-New Jersey Waterfront</i> by Andrew Herod .....	5
<i>Working People and Organized Labor in New York City in the Era of Industrialization</i> by Alan Singer ...	8
<i>Why Did New York City Garment Workers Organize A Labor Union?</i> .....	12
<i>New York City “Newsies” Strike (1899)</i> by Kelly Delia, Jason Sarofsky, Christine Robin and Jaimee Kahn	17
<i>Documenting New York State Labor History</i> .....	20
<i>Brookwood Labor College, Katonah, New York</i> by Leigh McGrath and Lee Burchett .....	29
<i>Labor Issues in World War I Era Rochester, New York</i> by Bobbie Robinson and Janet Gruner .....	31
<i>Manny Fried of Buffalo, NY: A Lifetime Commitment to Workers’ Rights</i> by Robert J. Heffern .....	34
<i>The Lower East Side Tenement Museum</i> by Lynda Kennedy .....	35
<i>Tamiment Library &amp; Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University</i> .....	36
<i>Brooklyn Works: 400 Years of Making a Living in Brooklyn</i> .....	37
<i>World War II Transforms Work Opportunities for Women</i> .....	38
<i>The 1913 Paterson, New Jersey Silk Strike</i> by Steve Golin .....	40
<i>Activist Women and Radical Labor Struggles in New Jersey</i> by Peter Dunn, Neil McCabe and Alan Singer	43
<i>The Battle of Passaic: Multiple Perspectives on Labor Struggles</i> .....	46
<i>American Labor Museum/Botto House National Landmark</i> by Jayne O’Neill .....	48
<i>Portraying Work and Workers in the Movies</i> by Norman Markowitz .....	49
<i>Using Children’s Literature to Teach about Work and Workers</i> by Judith Y. Singer .....	52
<i>Lyddie: A Mill Girl</i> by Mary Anne Savino .....	55
<i>American Artists Portray Work and Workers</i> by Susan Zwirn .....	56
<i>Why Unions? A Labor Song Lesson for Fifth Graders</i> by Andrea Libresco .....	58
<i>Labor Resources on the Internet</i> by Janet Gruner .....	60
<b>African Voices: Tragedy and Possibility: 100 Days of Genocide in Rwanda</b> by Jacqueline Murekatete; <i>Colonial Life, Independence and War in Sierra Leone</i> by Rebecca King Dyasi; <i>It was a Horrible Time</i> by Mariama Bah; <i>The Struggle for South Africa</i> by Lerole David Mametja; <i>Is Sustainable Development Possible in Africa?</i> .....	65
<b>Participation in Government: Using Portfolios to Teach Government Classes</b> by James Carpenter; <i>Educating Active Citizens for a Democratic Society</i> by Kathleen Kesson; <i>Presenting the Events of 9/11 in a Canadian Classroom</i> by John Myers .....	74
<i>Introducing the Authors</i> .....	80

# Social Studies Standards for What?

by Bill Bigelow

I've been away from teaching for two years, working as *Rethinking Schools'* ([www.Rethinkingschools.org](http://www.Rethinkingschools.org)) classroom editor and finishing *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World*. As I begin to think about my return to the classroom next fall, I've been revisiting Oregon's social studies standards. I'm sure that they are not that different from standards across the country. Many of them express mom-and-apple pie sentiments that few people could disagree with. For example, students should "understand how individuals, issues, and events changed or significantly influenced the course of U.S. history after 1900." Sure, it's worded awkwardly, but we get the idea: important things happened in the 20th century.

What strikes me while reading these standards is that there is no point to them, no purpose to learning about society. Most troubling, they are ethically empty. In a world of vast and growing economic inequalities, potentially catastrophic environmental crises, seemingly irresolvable ethnic conflicts, public health disasters (such as the AIDS epidemic in southern Africa), and growing hopelessness about possibilities for global justice, the Oregon standards feel irrelevant, distant from any attempt to resolve the burning issues of our time - hollow. And the Department of Education reportedly is marching forward with its plans to construct multiple-choice tests based on these standards.

If we must have fixed standards - and that's a big if - let's have some that actually address in broad terms the most vexing social problems of our time. Isn't that what standards, social studies standards, ought to do? Let's have a discussion about the most fundamental aspects of what our discipline ought to be confronting - not in the abstract, but now, in this era.

Here are my suggestions for six standards that should be central to all social studies courses. These are tentative and incomplete, but they begin to suggest the deep and purposeful inquiry that ought to be at the heart of every social studies course. Students will:

1. Consistently seek out explanations for social phenomena and learn to distinguish between explanation and mere description.
2. Recognize how their individual actions affect human and biotic communities throughout the world, reflecting on how every action they take has global social and ecological implications.
3. Question the ecological sustainability of key economic and cultural practices, and consider alternatives to practices that are deemed unsustainable.
4. Evaluate the role that racism has played - and continues to play - in shaping the experiences of social groups, especially with respect to economic and political power.
5. Appreciate the impact social movements have had in addressing injustice of all kinds, and evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts.
6. See themselves as capable, both individually and collectively, of contributing to social and ecological betterment.

The goal would be to engage in a process in which we ask: What are the basic tools of inquiry that are needed to comprehend the world's most important problems, and to imagine alternatives?

For the past several years, state education departments have engaged in a frenzy of standards writing, taking their cue from business groups with narrow interests and definitions of education. They've squandered countless millions of dollars. The aim of this process has been not so much to understand and change the world as it has been to construct tests that will hold teachers and students "accountable" - i.e., make them fearful of what will happen if they don't do what the state tells them to do.

Do I expect state departments of education to recognize the emptiness of their standardizing-and-testing course and to abandon this strategy of supposed school improvement? No. What I hope is that social studies teachers will resist a project that betrays the mission of social education. I hope that teachers will insist that our discipline is not about educating competent Trivial Pursuit players, nor about simply obeying orders from distant bureaucracies. The point of social education is to contribute to the creation of a more just world. And we need to say so.

## Teacher Response - Rethinking Social Studies Standards

Our goal is to have every issue of *Social Science Docket* include an essay on a key social studies concept or controversy in order to stimulate responses from readers and debate in the journal and in the New York and New Jersey Councils for the Social Studies. Bill Bigelow (bbpdx@aol.com) is the classroom editor for the newspaper *Rethinking Schools*. He teaches social studies at Franklin High School in Portland, Oregon. His essay is reprinted with permission from the Summer 2002 16/4 issue of *Rethinking Schools* (p. 9).

**Monica Longo, Kennedy HS, Bellmore, NY:** Social studies standards are often vague and one dimensional. They promote “chalk and talk” teaching which is dull and ineffective. Teachers are pressured to finish the curriculum so students do well on state exams. Many topics are ignored or are not covered in much detail. The curriculum lacks depth, controversy, and is impersonal. It offers students a one-sided view of history. Most students memorize facts for exams and disregard the information after the test. Although some students do well on the tests, there has not been any real learning. I believe standards are necessary to create organization and promote understanding. However, these standards should address the world at large, promote critical thinking, and interactions among students and teachers. These types of standards would create an educated, informed, and questioning classroom in which students are exposed to various views, experiences, and questions. This would create a truly educated society which values the views of others and the questioning spirit for greater understanding.

**Jayne O’Neill, Passaic County Technical Institute, Wayne NJ (Vice-President, NJCSS):** The problem in New Jersey is not whether the state social studies standards are useful as curriculum guidelines for a year long course of study. The problem is that they are so extensive that it is very difficult for teachers to incorporate them into daily lesson planning. At my school we are supposed to refer to which of the state standards we are addressing in each lesson. The standards are too detailed and hard to apply that they almost defeat their purpose. I prefer a broad umbrella that allows me flexibility in planning and the ability to respond to student ideas during lessons. I am uncomfortable with having to cover points a, b, c, and d, even when the lesson is taking a different path.

**Herb Brodsky, K-12 Soc.St. Coordinator, Freeport, NY:** New York State social studies standards are useful for teachers and districts as guiding principles and are moving us in the right direction.

They require districts to truly pay attention to the scope and sequence of the curriculum and to provide for staff development. While they are not always effectively translated into assessments, student academic issues can no longer be ignored.

**Diane Castino, Honiss School, Dumont NJ (Past President NJCSS):** I teach in an elementary school and find that the K-8 New Jersey state social studies standards help me and other teachers focus on the kind of information that is necessary to include in the curriculum. The standards make it possible for teachers in the older grades to count on what is being covered in previous years and to build on what students have already learned. The standards are actually integrated into the curriculum. Every unit and lesson plan has a section where I refer to the number of the standard and specific indicators that will be covered.

**Joseph Corr, Shaker High School, Latham NY (President, NYSCSS):** New York State social studies standards are absolutely useful to teachers because they require us to consider the entire package of content, concepts and skills as we plan units and lessons. They direct teachers to present students with multiple voices from history including those left out in traditional texts. The standards for history require that students learn to analyze the past and be familiar with different interpretations of historical events. They are encouraged to become critical thinkers and develop habits of mind and attitudes towards learning that promote the consideration of multiple perspectives on contemporary issues.

**Doug Cioffi, Kellenberg Memorial HS, Uniondale, NY:** According to the NCSS, “The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.” Bill Bigelow thinks social studies should go even further. He wants his students to learn to create a more just world. He believes that

meaningful social studies standards should “address in broad terms the most vexing social problems of our time.” Maybe I am a traditionalist, but I do not see the problem with requiring that before they begin to reshape the world, students learn the facts about the events and the people who have shaped the world already. Looking at broader social issues is important and should be included in the curriculum, however academic skills and content knowledge are also necessary.

**Ron Widelec, IS 238, Queens, NY:** Our schools have made it quite clear that the main focus of education today will be math and English (or literacy, or reading, or language arts, or whatever the new catch phrase of the month is). I believe social studies has fallen behind because it has not been taught in the correct way. The social studies curriculum needs to be skills-based, rather than content-based. Content-based learning is doomed to failure. Ask a class of Global studies students a week, or even the day, after an exam when the Spanish Armada was destroyed, when the Battle of Hastings took place, or in what year did the Roman Empire fall? You will most likely find that their content knowledge disappeared right after the test. Our number one priority must be to teach our children to become critical thinkers. Thinking critically is the skill that will allow our students to process the immense amount of information with which they are being bombarded.

**John Cartaina, Center for Civic & law-related Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ:** The current standards are very useful to teachers and supervisors because they set the benchmark for instruction. Without high quality standards and rigorous assessments social studies is short-changed because of the emphasis in many districts on language arts and math. I am particularly involved with promoting the New Jersey civics standards, which are modeled on the national civic standards. They give teachers, especially those working in the lower grades, guidelines on things like government, character education, and how students can become good citizens.

**Christine Roblin, Carey HS, Floral Park, NY:** I agree that students must be knowledgeable about current issues and problems. They need to ask questions and evaluate what is going on in the world today. They need to be aware of the “hot topics” of our time. They must discover the meaning of what Bigelow refers to as “global justice.” Simply learning about the past is not social studies, it is just history.

**Catherine Petoske, Massapequa School District, NY:** I don’t agree with Bigelow’s “doom and gloom” tone. Core values need to be maintained and respected as a foundation for creating a more just and caring world. With the standards and assessment movement, government is attempting to more effectively deliver educational and other services. I see significant strides taking place in our schools and society. Businesses have invested a great deal of time, effort and money to provide employees with diversification training and awareness. As a result of these efforts women have made tremendous progress towards the end of the 20th century.

**Kerry Creegan, Massapequa HS, Massapequa, NY:** Students and teachers feel the burden of new state standards. Students are pressed to assimilate into and accept a society where issues of inequality and injustice are constantly present. Teachers are forced to present a “laundry list of topics” that have little relevance to what students are interested in or what teachers consider important. While states claim that inquiry and critical thinking are important parts of the curriculum, they leave little time to promote them. The key to good teaching is interested and engaged teachers and students. Efforts to create “teacher-proof” standards are a step backwards.

**Darren Luskoff, Mineola HS, Mineola, NY:** Despite his good intentions, Bigelow’s proposal fails to ensure high standards for the lower income and minority students he claims to support. Without a centralized curriculum, individual districts or schools would make up their own standards. This could lead to an even greater disparity between students. Certainly this cannot be in our society’s best interest.

# The Impact of Containerization on Work on the New York-New Jersey Waterfront

by Andrew Herod

Today you can walk along the shoreline in Hoboken or Manhattan and see rows of abandoned piers. A century ago, these piers bustled with activity as ships brought goods from across the world to New York City and the surrounding region. Thousands of longshoremen or dockers worked these piers, and generations of families made a living from them. In the early 1950s, when the movie *On the Waterfront* was made, 40,000 dockers toiled in the port. Their work has mostly been replaced by a new form of cargo handling called containerization. As a result of this change, in the year 2000, 3,000 dockers in the Port of New York handled almost 65 million tons of cargo.

Traditionally, longshoring was a labor intensive industry. Low levels of capital investment required moving most solid cargo through ports on a piece-by-piece basis. Loose export cargo would first be delivered to the pier by truck where dockers would sort and check the goods. Usually dockers worked for stevedores contracted by particular steamship companies to load and discharge their ships, although sometimes ocean carriers set up their own in-house stevedoring subsidiaries. Once the cargo had been checked, dockers would place each individual piece onto pallets which were then lifted into the hold of a waiting ship. For a ship bringing goods into port the process would operate in reverse, with dockers discharging cargo from the hold, where it would be moved piece-by-piece to the local seaport terminal. From there, truckers would either load the cargo directly into their trucks or haul it to local trucking terminals for reloading into over-the-road vehicles (a practice known as “short-stopping”) for delivery to its ultimate destination.

Despite its labor intensive character, the very nature of longshoring and the industry meant that labor was required only intermittently. Longshoring employment was tied to the vagaries of cargo transportation and ship schedules. While in other industries, the demand for labor might fluctuate with the seasons or the economy’s position in the business cycle, a steamship company’s need for dockers varied on a day-by-day, hour-by-hour basis. Such irregularity of work was particularly evident in New York because of the port’s status as the nation’s primary point of entry for goods coming

from Europe. Shipping on domestic coastal routes could usually be reliably scheduled, but the larger distances covered in the deep-sea foreign trade meant that ships carrying goods from Europe often arrived late or in groups.

The lack of automation in cargo handling meant that the port’s steamship companies required a reserve army of dockers constantly at hand to ensure that during times of peak labor demand ships would be loaded or unloaded as quickly as possible. This reserve army of dockers, who were not paid when they were idle, was continually replenished by the millions of immigrants who landed at the port and sought employment on the piers.

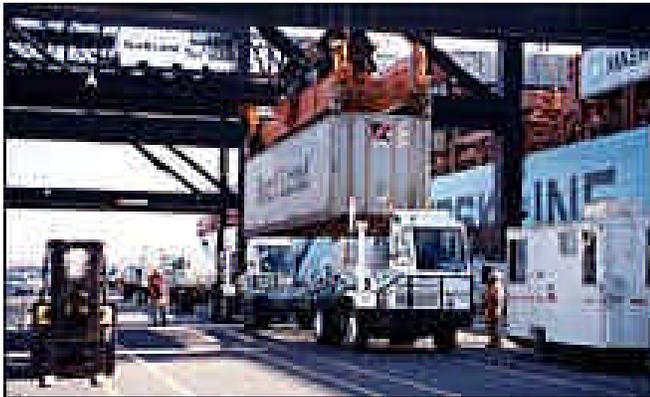
Employer control over the work process and hiring was both a symptom and a cause of the weakness of the dockers’ union, the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA). The union was unable to limit the labor supply which placed organizing efforts at a great disadvantage. The large supply of labor made restrictive practices unpopular with rank and file workers. The ease of replacement dampened militancy on the job. During strikes, local employers recruited strikebreakers, relying on ethnic divisions on the waterfront to play different groups of workers off against each other.

## “Shape Up”

The organization of the hiring process came to be known as “shape-up.” Whenever a ship docked, hiring bosses would call the dockers to collect or “shape” in a semi-circle at the head of the pier. Hiring bosses typically controlled hiring for between six and a dozen piers. They were ostensibly representatives of the employers. However, in 1916 the ILA negotiated an agreement giving work preference to union members. To enforce this agreement, the union insisted on the right to choose the employers’ hiring bosses. The New York Shipping Association (NYSA) agreed in return for the union’s maintenance of an oversupply of labor and suppression of strikes.

Because of the chronic oversupply of labor, dockers commonly offered bribes, or borrowed money at high interest rates from the hiring bosses to better their chances of being chosen for work. The potential for corruption and crime in the form

of kickbacks and loan-sharking was immense. The close links between the shape-up and criminal activity frequently resulted in the hiring of convicted criminals as pier bosses. Although investigators of waterfront crime usually assumed that such bosses were forced on hapless employers by corrupt union officials, this was not always the case. One industry representative admitted that many employers preferred using thugs because of the fear they instilled in the workforce and the ability they had to keep a docker in his place and maintain order.



**Container being loaded on a truck**

Historically, in New York, a longshoring gang generally consisted of 21 members. Eight worked in the hold, four on deck, eight on the dock, plus a gang boss. Sometimes dockers were hired as individual workers and formed into gangs. At other times they were hired as a group. Crews that regularly worked for particular companies were given hiring preference at those companies' piers. After the regular gangs were hired, vacancies and extra labor were filled by dockers picked from the shape up. On the odd occasion when the shape failed to produce enough gangs, a hiring boss would contact a local union office to request a traveling gang. Traveling gangs were most commonly employed on Manhattan's East Side where the geography of scattered piers hindered the dockers' ability to move quickly from piers where there were too many dockers to piers where there was a labor shortage. Although it might seem that the core group of dockers on a large steamship company's pier enjoyed some security of employment, these dockers were still subject to replacement by casual workers on the whim of the hiring boss.

The irregularity of work encouraged by the shape-up entrenched the sectionalism born of ethnic and political rivalries in the port. The lack of enough regular work meant that the right to work

particular piers were fiercely guarded. The West Side Manhattan piers were almost exclusively worked by Irish-Americans, while many of the Brooklyn piers were the domain of Italian-American dockers. Dockers who fell out of favor at their regular shape-up locations often found it very difficult to obtain work on another ethnic group's section of the waterfront. One of the consequences of shape-up was the development within the union of many small power enclaves. Local ILA leaders relied heavily on the hiring bosses' abilities to reward friends and censure opponents.

As a result of the organization of the labor market, low wages and poor working conditions were endemic to the industry. The casual-labor market which evolved on the New York waterfront condemned all but a minority of dockers to the risk of unstable employment. This instability was reflected in the distribution of hours worked and wages. Between October 1, 1949 and September 30, 1950, 12,777 of the port's 36,540 dockers employed by NYSA members worked fewer than 100 hours. This amounted to 35% of the total workforce.

#### **Containerization On The Waterfront**

The most significant technological change to have taken place in the longshoring industry was the development of an integrated system of freight transportation which made possible containerization. Containerization is essentially the putting of individual pieces of cargo into large metal boxes of standardized size that can be transferred between different forms of transportation - ships, trucks, and trains. It was first introduced into the industry in the 1950s and soon began to threaten traditional longshoring work. The first company to operate a door-to-door distribution network using containers was the Pan Atlantic Steamship Corporation (Sea-Land Services).

Containerization brought many benefits for the employers. It allowed ships to be loaded and unloaded much more quickly than in the days when every piece of cargo had to be handled by hand and drastically reduced the need for labor. For manufacturers, containerization has radically transformed the geography of product distribution. Goods shipped between Asia and the east coast of the United States that previously were sent through the Panama Canal, now can be unloaded at west coast ports and travel across North America by train.

Employers introduced containerization to reduce their cost of doing business. They were also able to

weaken the longshoremen's union and eliminate traditional work rules and practices. They especially targeted "feather-bedding," which forced employers to hire many more dockers than they believed were necessary for a particular task. The ILA, fearing that containerization would idle thousands of waterfront workers, sought financial security for its members. While accepting that they could not prevent the employers from adopting the new technology, ILA officials and rank and file workers fought for protective contract clauses to minimize work dislocation and its impacts on waterfront workers.

During the 1950s, containerization helped restructure employment relations on the waterfront. As ship owners and manufacturers increasingly used containers, labor productivity rates climbed. Because fewer dockers were required to load and unload the ships, it became more difficult for some dockers to find work and many left the industry. In 1952 over 44,000 dockers and cargo checkers actively worked on the waterfront. In 1970, there were still 21,600 names on the Waterfront Commission's longshoring roster. By 1980, the number had decreased to 13,177, and in 1989 there were only 8,000 registered dockers and checkers working in the port. Today, the average salary for a docker is \$83,000, the result of the ILA's ability to negotiate better contracts with the employers. On the other hand, the number of dockers who work the waterfront has been dramatically reduced.

The loss has not been distributed evenly throughout the port. The longshoring work which once kept the piers of Manhattan, Hoboken, and Jersey City bustling with activity has mostly migrated to the huge container facilities at Port Newark and the Elizabeth Marine Terminal. Hoboken now has no active piers, while in New York City, only the Red Hook Terminal in Brooklyn, Piers 1 to 8 in Brooklyn, the Passenger Ship Terminal on Manhattan's West Side, and the Howland Hook Marine Terminal on Staten Island continue to function. The development of the facilities at Port Newark-Elizabeth and the Port Authority Auto Marine Terminal in Jersey City - Bayonne have shifted the focal point of the port decidedly to the New Jersey side. This focus has been

further reinforced by Jersey City's privately held Global Marine Terminal and the Army's Military Ocean Terminal in Bayonne. New Jersey accounted for only 18.4% of the ports hiring in 1958. By 2000, 75% of all hiring took place on the Jersey side.

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### New Jersey Historical Society Summer Institute

The New Jersey Historical Society, The Newark Museum, and William Paterson University will sponsor an 8-day teacher institute during the first two weeks of July, 2004. The institute offers practical classroom applications using collections from both the New Jersey Historical Society and the Newark Museum. For more information, fees and to register, contact Office of Graduate Studies, William Paterson University, 300 Pompton Road, Wayne, NJ 07470 (973) 720-2237 after May 1, 2004.

# Working People and Organized Labor in New York City in the Era of Industrialization, 1820-1920

by Alan Singer

This paper was originally presented at the Summer 2002 “Gateway to the City – Teaching American History” conference, a collaboration between the New York City Department of Education Office of Social Studies and Multicultural Initiatives, the Brooklyn Historical Society and Hofstra University. It is followed by two document-based activities, *Why Did New York City Garment Workers Organize A Labor Union?*, designed for high school students, the *New York City “Newsies” Strike Against the World and Journal*, intended for middle school students, and a collection of documents from New York State labor history.

Modern industry, and with it, a modern working class, was created by the Industrial Revolution. Sean Wilentz (1984) in *Chants Democratic* argues that from 1788 to 1850, New York City witnessed the emergence of a working class, more quickly and with greater force than anywhere else in the United States. According to Kenneth Jackson (1995), as early as 1850, New York City was the most productive manufacturing center in the United States.

At the start of the industrial era, no one quite knew what was happening to the city, the nation and the world. In one of his most famous poems, “I Hear America Singing,” Walt Whitman, the poet laureate of the 19th century United States and of New York City, rejoiced in both the growth of industry and the role of workers. He described the “singing” of mechanics, carpenters, shoemakers and working girls. For Whitman, workers were the backbone of industrial change; they created the music and songs of industrial life. But while many people celebrate Whitman’s poetry, not everyone shared his views about working people and the dignity of labor. During the Civil War alone, from 1861 through 1865, there were more than 90 major strikes in New York City demanding higher wages as a protection against wartime inflation. Then in 1872, 100,000 workers in the New York City building trades held a successful three month strike to win an eight-hour workday.

What did it mean to be a worker in New York City during the industrial era?

In the 1840s and 1850s, Five Points in Manhattan, an overpopulated, swamp and disease-ridden slum near what is now Chinatown, was the home to many recent immigrants and New York City’s less skilled work force. Because of low wages and high unemployment, more than one-fourth of Five Point families were forced to take in boarders in order to make ends meet. In the poorest sections, on Baxter and Mulberry Streets, most apartment

dwellers lived with boarders, who made up about 15% of the total population of Five Points.

Although most of the boarders lived in private dwellings, there were also commercial boardinghouses. Often these were the worst place to live. The seediest, and cheapest, were located in cellars. A *New York Tribune* report in 1850 found that in the Sixth Ward, which included Five Points, there were 285 basement apartments with 1,156 occupants. They lived “without air, without light” in apartments “filled with damp vapor from the mildewed walls, and with vermin in ration to the dirtiness of the inhabitants.” The residents of these cellar apartments were easily identified by their “whitened and cadaverous countenance” and “the odor of the person. . . ; a musty smell, which . . . pervades every article of dress, . . . as well as the hair and skin” (Anbinder, 77-78).

## How the Other Half Lives

Sadly, forty years later, conditions in these communities had not improved significantly. Jacob Riis described tenement life in *How the Other Half Lives*, written in 1890. “The sinks are in the hallway, that all the tenants may have access--and all to be poisoned alike by their summer stench . . . listen! That hack cough, that tiny, helpless wail--what do they mean? The child is dying with measles. With half a chance it might have lived; but it had none. Come over here. Step carefully over this baby--it is a baby, in spite of its rags and dirt . . . That baby’s parents live in the rear tenement here. A hundred thousand people lived in rear tenements in New York last year” ( 43-44).

Living conditions in the working-class communities of New York City were made even worse, if that is possible, by the practice of homework in the garment industry. According to a memoir by one immigrant tailor, “we worked piecework with our wives, and very often our children. . . We worked at home in our rooms. We had to buy

fuel to heat the irons for pressing, and light in winter.” A letter to *New York Tribune* in 1850 described most of the tailors as “half-paid” and “half-starved.” The local tailors finally organized a union in 1850 and called a city-wide general strike in July to win a higher wage rate (Anbinder, 117-118).

### **The Brooklyn Bridge**

Workers in other industries also suffered from horrendous working situations and tried to organize unions in order to win higher wages and better conditions. We have been awed by the Brooklyn Bridge, but few of us think about the human cost of its construction – there were between 20 and 30 deaths of workers, including that of John A. Roebling, who designed the bridge and led the initial construction team. In May 1871, laborers on the New York tower of the Brooklyn Bridge found blood spurting from their noses and mouths and began to experience terrible cramps, and as the shaft sank deeper, men began to die (Gotham, 936-937). Desperate, on May 8, 1871, the caisson men struck for a pay increase to three dollars for a four hour shift. The bridge company agreed to \$2.75 which the men turned down. The strike collapsed when the company threatened to fire all strikers.

Strikes, even when successful, usually only brought short term relief, lasting until the next economic downturn. Irish sewer diggers struck in 1874, but were replaced by newly arrived Italian immigrants (Arbinder, 377). During the Depression of 1877, a wage reduction led to strikes on train lines across the country. New York City workers scheduled a meeting for July 25 to vote on joining the strike. In preparation, the National Guard was called out, garrisons placed at rail depots, its Central Park headquarters surrounded by howitzers, and a U.S. Navy warship dispatched to New York harbor. The 20,000 workers who attended a mass meeting at Tompkins Square Park in the East Village were attacked by charging, club-wielding policemen.

Nevertheless, workers continued to organize. There was a major freight handlers strike on the docks in 1882 (Arbinder, 378). A series of short strikes in the 1880s led to the unionization of the New York-area street car companies. However, the union was later defeated in a bitter strike in Brooklyn during the winter of 1895, when police, armed company guards, and National Guard troops open fired on transit workers (Freeman, 16).

In August, 1883, a U.S. Senate committee investigating the relations between labor and capital came to New York City. One of the workers they

interviewed was a machinist named John Morrison. He was asked about “the prospect for a man now working in one of these machine shops, a man who is temperate and economical, to become a boss or a manufacturer of machinery.” According to Morrison, “there is no chance. They have lost all desire to become bosses now. The trade has become demoralized. First they earn so small wages; and next, it takes so much capital to become a boss now that they cannot think of it, because it takes all they can earn to live . . . I understand that at the present day you could not start in the machinist’s business to compete successfully with any of these large firms with a capital of less than \$20,000 or \$30,000” (Litwack, 1962: 11-15).

### **Samuel Gompers**

In this demoralized world, the labor movement offered working people their major hope. During this period, New York City was at the center of two new large labor organizations, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Knights of Labor. Samuel Gompers, who was one of the founders of the AFL, was born in London in 1850, to Dutch-Jewish parents who brought him to New York City in 1863. He worked in his teens and early twenties making cigars in an East side tenement apartment with his father. Gompers, who attended free lectures and classes at Cooper Union in Greenwich Village, became a socialist and an activist in the Cigarmakers Union. Following the failure of a Cigarmakers strike in 1877, he developed a philosophy of labor organization which came to be known as “pure and simple unionism.” He helped make the Cigarmakers union more businesslike by charging high dues that would be used to create a strike fund and provide workers with sick benefits (Gotham, 1089-1090).

This same period saw the development of a New York City branch of the Knights of Labor. A January, 1882 rally at Cooper Union led to the formation of city-wide trades assembly and the creation of a Central Labor Union of New York, Brooklyn and Jersey City. It also led to the first “Labor Day” parade on September 5, 1882. Wearing the regalia of work and carrying banners, 20,000 marchers assembled near City Hall and moved up Broadway to Union Square. By 1884, the Knights had 36 affiliated unions in New York City and by 1886, over 200 organizations representing approximately 50,000 workers. While the AFL concentrated on organizing skilled workers to negotiate higher wages and better working conditions with their employers, the Knights welcomed skilled

and unskilled labor and launched a political campaign for an eight hour day and an end to child labor (Gotham, 1091-1092).

On May 1, 1886, the American labor movement launched a nationwide offensive. This series of strikes has long been identified with the "Haymarket Riot" on May 3 in Chicago, where a bomb was thrown as local police attacked a demonstration. Eight policemen died as a result of the bomb and their own firing into the crowd. In New York City, 45,000 workers walked off their jobs in coordinated strikes. They included street car conductors, cigarmakers, building trades workers and machinists. Employers tried to use the courts to quash the strikes. Leaders of the Musicians' Union were convicted of "conspiracy" for promoting a boycott of a non-union beer hall and the brand of beer it sold and were sentenced to up to four years in Sing-Sing prison (Gotham, 1098).

In response, workers organized a United Labor Party which nominated Henry George for mayor of New York City. Business interests nominated Teddy Roosevelt as the Republican candidate hoping he could stop the workers revolt. The Tammany Hall Democratic machine and the Roman Catholic Church backed a wealthy businessman, Abram Hewitt, in an effort to stop the labor movement. Hewitt eventually won with 90,552, to 68,110 for George and 60,435 for Roosevelt. Soon after the election, as a result of strains caused by an economic depression, the national response to the Chicago Haymarket Riot, and the anti-labor and socialist stand of the Roman Catholic Church, the New York City labor coalition broke up. The national Knights of Labor also failed to survive.

At this point I would like to focus on two labor organizing drives that especially lend themselves to classroom exploration, one, because it was conducted by junior high school age and younger boys, and the other, because it is associated with the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire, a transcendent event in the history of the New York City and American labor movements.

### **The New York City "Newsies" strike**

The New York City "Newsies" strike against the *World* and *Journal* newspapers was portrayed in a Disney movie (*Newsies*, 1992) and by some of the contemporary newspapers as cute, with boys speaking in heavily accented, almost pidgin-English. However, in actuality, the strike was a serious struggle for social justice. According to the *New York Daily Tribune*, on July 20, 1899, "About 300

newsboys decided not to sell "The Evening World" and "The Evening Journal," and went on strike . . . against an increase in the price of the papers from 50 cents a hundred copies to 70 cents." Jack Sullivan, leader of the Arbitration Committee told the *Tribune*, "They tink we're cravens . . . but we'll show 'em dat we aint. De time is overripe fer action. De cops won't have not time fer us. . . . Well, den, de strike is ordered. Der must be no half measures, my men. If you sees any one sellin' de 'Woild' or 'Joinal,' swat 'em . . . tear 'em up, trow 'em in de river any ole ting."

The next day the *Tribune* reported on a strike meeting addressed by Grand Master Workman "Kid" Blink, alias "Mug Magee." He told the group, "Fr'en's, Brudders and Feller Citerzens: We is united in a patriotic cause. The time has cum when we mus' eder make a stan' or be downtridden by the decypils of acrice and greed'ness. Dey wants it all, and when we cums to 'em dey sez we must take the papes at der own price or leave 'em. Dis ain't no time to temporize. Is ye all still wid us in de cause?"

Unfortunately for the boys, the police were called in to break their strike. On July 24, 1899, the *Tribune* reported that "[f]our newsboys were arraigned before Magistrate Mott in the Centre Street police court yesterday morning, charged by Detective Allen and Policemen Distler and Snyder, of the Oak Street station, with parading without the proper license."

### **Organizing Garment Workers**

The second organizing drive, the 1909 walkout of 20,000 shirtwaistmakers in the garment industry, was much more successful, but also more problematic and much more tragic. The rally that led to the this strike was described by the *New York Call*, a socialist newspaper, in an article on November 23, 1909. Clara Lemlich, who had been badly beaten by hired company thugs during an earlier strike, interrupted the speakers and demanded the right to address the audience. "Cries came from all parts of the hall, 'Getup on the platform!' Willing hands lifted the frail little girl with flashing black eyes to the stage, and she said simply: 'I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!' As the tremulous voice of the girl died away, the audience rose en masse and cheered her to the echo. A grim sea of faces, with high purpose and resolve, they shouted and cheered the declaration of war for living conditions hoarsely."

According to historian Philip Foner (1980:231), after Lemlich spoke, the chairman of the meeting called for a vote and three thousand voices shouted unanimous approval. He then demanded of the crowd, "Will you take the old Hebrew oath?" At that point, "three thousand right arms shot up, and three thousand voices repeated the Yiddish words: 'If I turn traitor to the cause I now pledge, may this hand wither from the arm I now raise.'"

Above, I decried this union organizing drive as both problematic and tragic. It was problematic because of the labor movement's, especially the AFL's, poor record on the organization of African American workers. Because of discrimination by the unions, the employers' association was successful in recruiting Black strikebreakers, who with police protection, were able to cross the picket lines (Foner, 233). The *New York Age*, an African American newspaper, ran an editorial where it charged that "Trade Unionism is hostile to the colored race and that the Negro will continue to be the pivot upon which future strikes will turn so long as labor will ignore his right to work and thwart his ambition to advance in the mechanical world" (Aptheker, 1968: 844). Editors refused to condemn strikebreaking since Black workers had "no assurance that the union would in the future admit without discrimination colored girls to membership." The garment workers union, in a letter published by W.E.B. DuBois in *The Horizon*, defended its actions and claimed that "in both Philadelphia and New York, some of the most devoted members of the Ladies Waist Makers Union are colored girls" and that to promote participation by Black workers, strike meetings were being held at the "Fleet Street Methodist Memorial Church (colored) in Brooklyn and St. Marks Methodist Church in Manhattan."

### Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

Unfortunately, as with most things in life, there are no simple, happy endings. Employers continued to resist the union, and conditions in the shops remained horrible until the tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. The deaths of 146 young immigrant Jewish and Italian girls in this conflagration finally swung public sentiment to the union.

Rose Schneiderman, an ILGWU organizer, gave a memorial speech at a mass funeral for these girls.

(*The Survey*, April 8, 1911). It is one of the best statements I know defending the right of workers to form unions and the necessity for social struggle and collective action.

"This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city. Every week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. There are so many of us for one job it matters little if 146 of us are burned to death.

We have tried you citizens; we are trying you now, and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers, brothers and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us.

Public officials have only words of warning to us - warning that we must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back, when we rise, into the conditions that make life unbearable.

I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement."

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**Document-based Essay: Why did New York City garment workers organize a labor union?**

**Directions:**

1. Read all of the documents and answer the questions after each document.
2. Use the documents, your answers to the questions, and your knowledge of United States history, to answer the document-based essay question: Why did New York City garment workers organize a labor union? Your essay should have a clear introduction that states your views on the topic, at least three paragraphs that present supporting evidence, and a concluding paragraph that summarizes your ideas. It should be approximately 500 words long.

**1. “Life in the Shop” by Clara Lemlich**

*Clara Lemlich, executive board member of Local 25, sparked the 1909 walkout of shirtwaistmakers with her call for a strike. This report was published in the New York Evening Journal, November 28, 1909.*

There are two kinds of work - regular, that is salary work, and piecework. The regular work pays about \$6 a week and the girls have to be at their machines at 7 o'clock in the morning and they stay at them until 8 o'clock at night, with just one-half hour for lunch in that time. The shops [factories]. Well, there is just one row of machines that the daylight ever gets to - that is the front row, nearest the window. The girls at all the other rows of machines back in the shops have to work by gaslight, by day as well as by night. Oh, yes, the shops keep the work going at night, too. The bosses in the shops are hardly what you would call educated men, and the girls to them are part of the machines they are running. They yell at the girls and they “call them down” even worse than I imagine the Negro [Black] slaves were in the South. There are no dressing rooms for the girls in the shops. They have to hang up their hats and coats—such as they are—on hooks along the walls. Sometimes a girl has a new hat. It never is much to look at because it never costs more than 50 cents, that means that we have gone for weeks on two-cent lunches—dry cake and nothing else. The shops are unsanitary - that’s the word that is generally used, but there ought to be a worse one used. Whenever we tear or damage any of the goods we sew on, or whenever it is found damaged after we are through with it, whether we have done it or not, we are charged for the piece and sometimes for a whole yard of the material. At the beginning of every slow season, \$2 is deducted from our salaries. We have never been able to find out what this is for.

**Questions**

1. What are conditions like in the shops [factories]?
2. How do “bosses” treat workers?
3. In your opinion, what is life like for these workers?

**2. Political Cartoons from the New York Call.** What is the main idea of each cartoon?



December 24, 1909



December 29, 1909



January 3, 1910

Cartoons are available at <http://womhist.binghamton.edu/shirt/doclist.htm>

### 3. “The Cooper Union Meeting”, *New York Call*, November 23, 1909

*Grievances common throughout the shirtwaist industry exploded into a general strike by garment workers. This article was published in the New York Call, a socialist newspaper, November 23, 1909.*

The decision to strike was reached yesterday at the Cooper Union meeting which was addressed by Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL. . . . “A man would be less than human,” said Gompers, in opening, “if he were not impressed with your reception. I want you men and women not to give all your enthusiasm for a man, no matter who he may be. I would prefer that you put all of your enthusiasm into your union and your cause.” Continuing, Gompers said: “I have never declared a strike in all my life. I have done my share to prevent strikes, but there comes a time when not to strike is but to rivet the chains of slavery upon our wrists.”

Speaking of the possibility of a general strike, Gompers said: “Yes, Mr. Shirtwaist Manufacturer, it may be inconvenient for you if your boys and girls go out on strike, but there are things of more importance than your convenience and your profit. There are the lives of the boys and girls working in your business.” Appealing to the men and women to stand together, he declared: “If you had an organization before this, it would have stood there as a challenge to the employers who sought to impose such conditions as you bear. . . .”

“I ask you to stand together,” said Gompers in conclusion, “to have faith in yourselves, to be true to your comrades. If you strike, be cool, calm, collected and determined. Let your watchword be: Union and progress, and until then no surrender!” This was greeted with a storm of applause.

Clara Lemlich, who was badly beaten up by thugs during the strike in the shop of Louis Leiserson, interrupted Jacob Panken just as he started to speak, saying: “I wanted to say a few words.” Cries came from all parts of the hall, “Get up on the platform!” Willing hands lifted the frail little girl with flashing black eyes to the stage, and she said simply: “I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!” As the tremulous voice of the girl died away, the audience rose en masse and cheered her to the echo. A grim sea of faces, with high purpose and resolve, they shouted and cheered the declaration of war for living conditions hoarsely.

#### Questions

1. Who is Samuel Gompers?
2. What does Samuel Gompers mean when he says, “there comes a time when not to strike is but to rivet the chains of slavery upon our wrists”?
3. If you were in the audience, would you have supported Clara Lemlich’s call for a “general strike”? Explain

### 4. “A Half Day of Your Wages for the Strikers”

*The Forwards was a Yiddish language Jewish daily newspaper. This article (January 12, 1910: 1) asks other workers to perform “your duty” as a worker and a Jew and send half of their daily wages to strikers.*

Workers! Eight weeks, how thousands of sisters and brothers struggle. Among the battlers there are girls who earn for families; men who are fathers of large households. Before the strike broke out, they also had their little earnings -- this is still when one of the main great things of this great strike -- after, people need to declare how bad, how bitter they are now. Will we then tolerate that the strugglers should, on the threshold of their victory, which is the victory of all Jewish workers, must wear shame on the head for their tyranny?

We are not permitted to tolerate this. All Jewish workers from every city should break off a bite of their bites [a portion of their earnings] and send this to the strikers. The United Hebrew Trades, the mother of all Jewish unions, extends her begging hands to request help for her children, for the Ladies Waist Makers Union.

The United Hebrew Trades calls upon Jewish labor. This is the week from Saturday, the 15th until Saturday, the 22nd of January, every worker, man or woman, should give down a half day of his or her wages and send this through the workers’ union for the strikers.

#### Questions

1. What is the *Forwards*?
2. What “plea” is being made in this article?
3. Why are other workers being asked to pledge money to the strikers?
4. If read this article, would you support the pledge? Explain.

### 5. Rose Gollup becomes a Garment Worker

*Rose Gollup emigrated from a small village in western Russia in 1892 at the age of twelve. Her father, who had come to New York City earlier, paid for her ticket. She and her father lived in a rented room on the Lower East Side, saving money to bring over her mother and her younger brothers and sisters. Document 5 describes her first two days at work. Document 6 explains why she joined the garment workers' union (Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, NY: George H. Doran, 1918: 108-12, 123-27).*

My hands trembled so that I could not hold the needle properly. It took me a long while to do the coat. But at last it was done. I took it over to the boss and stood at the table waiting while he was examining it. He took long, trying every stitch with his needle. All day I took my finished work and laid it on the boss's table. He would glance at the clock and give me other work. Before the day was over I knew that this was a "piece work shop," that there were four machines and sixteen people were working. . . . Seven o'clock came and every one worked on. I wanted to rise as father had told me to do and go home. But I had not the courage to stand up alone. I kept putting off going from minute to minute. My neck felt stiff and my back ached. I wished there were a back to my chair so that I could rest against it a little. When the people began to go home it seemed to me that it had been night a long time.

The next morning when I came into the shop at seven o'clock, I saw at once that all the people were there and working as steadily as if they had been at work a long while. I had just time to put away my coat and go over to the table, when the boss shouted gruffly, "Look here, girl, if you want to work here you better come in early. No office hours in my shop." From this hour a hard life began for me. He refused to employ me except by the week. He paid me three dollars and for this he hurried me from early until late. He gave me only two coats at a time to do. When I took them over and as he handed me the new work he would say quickly and sharply, "Hurry!" And when he did not say it in words he looked at me and I seemed to hear even more plainly, "Hurry!" I hurried but he was never satisfied.

#### Questions

1. How is Rose Gollup treated the first days on the job?
2. Why are the other workers working extra hours?

### 6. Rose Gollup Attends a Union Meeting

A young man was standing on the platform speaking. What he was saying now was something like this:

"Fourteen hours a day you sit on a chair, often without a back, felling coats. Fourteen hours you sit close to the other feller hand feeling the heat of her body against yours, her breath on your face. Fourteen hours with your back bent, your eyes close to your work you sit stitching in a dull room often by gas light. In the winter during all these hours as you sit stitching your body is numb with cold. In the summer, as far as you are concerned, there might be no sun, no green grass, no soft breezes. You with your eyes close to the coat on your lap are sitting and sweating the livelong day. The black cloth dust eats into your very pores. You are breathing the air that all the other bent and sweating bodies in the shop are throwing off, and the air that comes in from the yard heavy and disgusting with the filth and the odor of the open toilets . . .

Each one of you alone can do nothing. Organize! Demand decent wages that you may be able to live in a way fit for human beings, not for swine. See that your shop has pure air and sun, that your bodies may be healthy. Demand reasonable hours that you may have time to know your families, to think, to enjoy. Organize! Each one of you alone can do nothing. Together you can gain everything."

For a moment the room was perfectly still. Then there was a storm of applause and the people rose and began to press close to the platform. I went to a vacant seat in an out-of-the-way corner and watched the people going out in groups and talking excitedly. When the hall was almost empty I went over to the secretary's desk. "I want to join the union," I said.

#### Questions

1. Why does the speaker believe the workers should join the union?
2. In your opinion, why did Rose Gollup decide to join?
3. If you were a worker in this industry, would you have joined the union? Explain.

7. **“Girl Strikers Tell the Rich Their Woes”** *The New York Times*, (December, 16, 1909: 3)  
*The shirtwaist workers strike won the support of some wealthy New Yorkers, especially among “progressive” women, who were disturbed by conditions in the industry. This article tells why their union is important.*

“Also, it is true that I made \$15 a week,” said little Clara Lemlich yesterday afternoon to 150 well-to-do women gathered in the Colony Club, Madison Avenue and Thirteenth Street, at the invitation of Miss Anne Morgan, Miss Elizabeth Marbury, and Mrs. Egerton L. Winthrop, Jr., to hear representatives of the striking shirtwaist makers tell their side of the fight, now in its fourth week.

“I did not strike because I myself was not getting enough,” the east side girl went on to tell her Fifth Avenue audience, “I struck because all the others should get enough. It was not for me; it was for the others.”

More of the strikers spoke, as well as several women and men sympathizers, and then Mrs. Philip M. Lydig and Elsie De Wolf passed around two hats, which brought back over \$1,300. It was announced, also, that the Shuberts would give 50 per cent of the receipts of one of their New York theatres all next week to the strikers, that percentage being the share of the Shuberts in the receipts.

Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, President of the club, opened the meeting by saying that it was not to be understood that the club was throwing its weight on one side or the other in this strike. The Colony Club was a social organization, she said, and though many of the members individually sympathized with the striking shirtwaist makers, the organization was not in the fight. Then she introduced Miss Mary Dreier of the Woman’s Trade Union League, as Chairman of the meeting. This league, which many women of wealth and social position are joining, is heartily in favor of the strikers. Its chief work is helping along trade unionism.

Miss Dreier, who has been in the thick of the fight for weeks, said she would tell something about what happened before the strike was officially declared on Nov. 22. Before that time some of the more courageous of the 40,000 shirtwaist makers, most of whom are girls, had joined the union. Up to Nov. 22 the union numbered hardly 1,000 members.

“Girls who were brave enough to join the union found that they were being discharged for that reason alone,” she went on. “A lot of the girls were discharged for asking others to join the union. One firm turned out, all at once, 140 shirtwaist makers solely because they had become union members. One by one and in groups they were being dropped, and the union members saw that they must risk all, that they must fight and win or surrender; that they must sink or swim.

“So they decided to fight. Already 231 manufacturers have agreed with the union, and their girls have gone back to work. I think if these employers were asked what concessions they had made it would be found that the girls are not asking anything unreasonable.

“There are, however, some 7,000 girls still out. The employers of these are determined that they will not recognize the union. The battle between these girls and these most determined employers has begun in earnest. It is a question, which will win--the employers with plenty of money or the girls with none. The girls have one advantage now in the fact that a very busy part of the shirtwaist making season is about to begin, when those shops that are idle or running on part time will lose considerable trade.”

### Questions

1. Where are Clara Lemlich and the strikers telling their story?
2. Why are they speaking with this group?
3. What does this group do to help the strikers?
4. In your opinion, why would a group of wealthy women support the strikers?

**8. “Eyewitness at the Triangle”** (*Milwaukee Journal*, March 27, 1911).

*William G. Shepherd, a United Press reporter, was present at the scene of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire that killed 146 young immigrant Jewish and Italian working girls.*

“I was walking through Washington Square when a puff of smoke issuing from the factory building caught my eye. I reached the building before the alarm was turned in. I saw every feature of the tragedy visible from outside the building. I learned a new sound—a more horrible sound than description can picture. It was the thud of a speeding, living body on a stone sidewalk.

Thud—dead, thud—dead, thud—dead, thud—dead. Sixty-two thud—deads. I call them that, because the sound and the thought of death came to me each time, at the same instant. There was plenty of chance to watch them as they came down. The height was eighty feet.

The first ten thud—deads shocked me. I looked up—saw that there were scores of girls at the windows. The flames from the floor below were beating in their faces. Somehow I knew that they, too, must come down, and something within me—something that I didn’t know was there—steeled me.

I even watched one girl falling. Waving her arms, trying to keep her body upright until the very instant she struck the sidewalk, she was trying to balance herself. Then came the thud—then a silent, unmoving pile of clothing and twisted, broken limbs.

As I reached the scene of the fire, a cloud of smoke hung over the building. . . . I looked up to the seventh floor. There was a living picture in each window—four screaming heads of girls waving their arms.

“Call the firemen,” they screamed—scores of them. “Get a ladder,” cried others. They were all as alive and whole and sound as were we who stood on the sidewalk. I couldn’t help thinking of that. We cried to them not to jump. We heard the siren of a fire engine in the distance. The other sirens sounded from several directions.

“Here they come,” we yelled. “Don’t jump; stay there.”

One girl climbed onto the window sash. Those behind her tried to hold her back. Then she dropped into space. I didn’t notice whether those above watched her drop because I had turned away. Then came that first thud. I looked up, another girl was climbing onto the window sill; others were crowding behind her. She dropped. I watched her fall, and again the dreadful sound. Two windows away two girls were climbing onto the sill; they were fighting each other and crowding for air. Behind them I saw many screaming heads. They fell almost together, but I heard two distinct thuds. Then the flames burst out through the windows on the floor below them, and curled up into their faces.

The firemen began to raise a ladder. Others took out a life net and, while they were rushing to the sidewalk with it, two more girls shot down. The firemen held it under them; the bodies broke it; the grotesque simile of a dog jumping through a hoop struck me. Before they could move the net another girl’s body flashed through it. The thuds were just as loud, it seemed, as if there had been no net there. It seemed to me that the thuds were so loud that they might have been heard all over the city.

As I looked up I saw a love affair in the midst of all the horror. A young man helped a girl to the window sill. Then he held her out, deliberately away from the building and let her drop. He seemed cool and calculating. He held out a second girl the same way and let her drop. Then he held out a third girl who did not resist. I noticed that. They were as unresisting as if he were helping them onto a streetcar instead of into eternity. Undoubtedly he saw that a terrible death awaited them in the flames, and his was only a terrible chivalry.

Then came the love amid the flames. He brought another girl to the window. Those of us who were looking saw her put her arms about him and kiss him. Then he held her out into space and dropped her. But quick as a flash he was on the window sill himself. His coat fluttered upward—the air filled his trouser legs. I could see that he wore tan shoes and hose. His hat remained on his head.

**Questions**

1. What caught the attention of the author of this newspaper article?
2. Why were the firefighters unable to help the girls caught in the fire?
3. Why did the young man help the girls jump to their deaths?
4. How do you think the people of New York City and the nation responded to this story? Why?

## New York City “Newsies” Strike Against the World and Journal, 1899

Sources: [www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/offord/192/articles](http://www.fortunecity.com/meltingpot/offord/192/articles); *The New York Times*, *What We Saw, 1851-2001*  
by Kelly Delia, Jason Sarofsky, Christine Roblin and Jaimee Kahn

The July, 1899 strike of New York City newspaper delivery boys, the “Newsies,” is an excellent vehicle for teaching about the values and techniques of labor unions and social struggles against injustice in the industrial era. Their strike was a response to a decision by *The Evening World* and *The Evening Journal*, parts of the national Pulitzer and Hearst newspaper empires, to raise the wholesale price they charged street vendors. The “Newsies” organized and demanded that the original price be restored. When Pulitzer and Hearst refused, 300 boys went on strike. One boy was quoted as saying, “We’re here fer our rights an’ we will die defendin’ em.” Eventually the strike spread to Harlem, Long Island City, Staten Island and Brooklyn in New York City; Newark, Jersey City, Plainfield, Trenton, Elizabeth, Paterson, and Asbury Park, New Jersey; Mount Vernon, Yonkers, Troy, and Rochester in New York State; and New Haven, Connecticut, Fall River, Massachusetts, and Providence, RI.

The strike lasted from July 18, 1899 through August 2, 1899. The publishers ultimately decided to offer the “Newsies” a compromise, which they accepted. The new higher price for the newspapers remained, but the companies agreed to buy back all unsold papers at a 100% refund. During their short strike, the “Newsies” demonstrated that workers, even children, could fight for rights against powerful employers and be successful.

### Instructions:

1. Read each of the newspaper excerpts from the “Newsies” strike.
2. Write a brief summary of each article.
3. Make a chronological list of the events in the strike.
4. Write a sympathetic or critical newspaper editorial explaining the issues in the strike to your readers.

**Newsies 1.** “Newsboys Go On Strike” (*New York Daily Tribune*, July 21, 1899). About 300 newsboys decided not to sell “The Evening World” and “The Evening Journal,” and went on strike yesterday morning against an increase in the price of the papers from 50 cents a hundred copies to 70 cents. The boys say at the old price they were only able to make about 25 cents a day, and that the increase in the price to them would mean a loss of livelihood.

Early in the morning half a dozen small figures were grouped about their leader, “Jack” Sullivan. They comprised the members of the Arbitration Committee who had gone as a last resort to the papers to demand their rights. “Well, my brave men, what news?” The leader’s voice was husky as he put the question. “Its dis a way,” said Boots, the spokesman of the committee. “We went to de bloke wot sells de papers and we tells him dat its got to be two fer a cent or nuthin’. He says, ‘Wot are yer goin’ to do about it if yer don’t get ‘em?’ ‘Strike,’ sez I, and Monix, he puts in his oar and backs me up. The bloke sez ‘Go ahead and strike,’ and here we is. Dat’s all.” The recital brought a scowl to the leader’s face.

“They tink we’re cravens,” he said, “but we’ll show ‘em dat we aint. De time is overripe fer action. De cops won’t have not time fer us. What is de sense of de meetin’? Is it strike?” “Sure, Mikel!” piped half a dozen voices. “Well, den, de strike is ordered. Der must be no half measures, my men. If you sees any one sellin’ de ‘Woid’ or ‘Joinal,’ swat ‘em.” “You mean swipe de papes?” “Sure tear ‘em up, trow ‘em in de river any ole ting. If der’s no funder bizness de mettin’s adjointed.”

**Newsies 2.** “Newsboys’ Strike Goes On” (*New York Daily Tribune*, July 22, 1899). There was a called meeting of the striking newsboys in Frankfort Street yesterday morning for the purpose of repeating their defiance of the boycotted newspapers and to arrange further means for carrying the strike to a successful issue. Grand Master Workman “Kid” Blink, alias “Mug Magee,” called the meeting to order, and, amid cheers spoke in past as follows: “Fr’en’s, Brudders and Feller Citerzens: We is united in a patriotic cause. The time has cum when we mus’ eder make a stan’ or be downtridden by the decypils of acrice and greed’ness. Dey wants it all, and when we cums to ‘em dey sez we must take the papes at der own price or leave ‘em. Dis ain’t no time to temporize. Is ye all still wid us in de cause?”

“Sure! Sure!” came from a chorus of throats. “Well, den,” continued the chairman, “we’ll go ahead wid de warfare, same as we done yistiday. Let no guilty man escape. Lay fer ‘em and give it to ‘em hot.”

As a result of the meeting many of the incidents of the preceding day were repeated yesterday. Whenever a boy appeared with the papers in his hand he was immediately surrounded and his stock was torn to shreds. The boys did not confine themselves to the street sellers, but in a number of cases attacked stands where papers are sold and made havoc with the extras which had been placed there.

**Newsies 3.** A Newsboys' Meetin, (*New York Daily Tribune*, July 24, 1899). The striking newsboys will hold a meeting at 8 o'clock to-night in Irving Hall, Nos. 214 and 216 Broome Street, to discuss their grievances. . . . The boys expect to have a great time at the meeting, at which they say they hope "ter do" the newspapers with which they are at war. . . .

Four newsboys were arraigned . . . in the Centre Street police court yesterday morning, charged . . . with parading without the proper license. . . . Saturday afternoon they decided that the proper thing was a parade. They accordingly got about a hundred newsboys together, had some banners made, and started a parade up Park Row, past the offices of the offending papers, and down Frankfort Street. The police of the Oak Street station were informed of the parade, which made up in noise what it lacked in numbers, and told the leaders that it would have to disband. This they promised to do, and while the police were in sight, did so.

The minute they thought the officers back in the station house the line was again formed, the leaders issuing orders that if the police move in sight to "scatter." Just as they were about to start the three officers ran around the corner and placed the four leaders under arrest.

**Newsies 4.** "Newsies' Standing Fast" (*New York Daily Tribune*, July 26, 1899). There was no let up . . . in the newsboys' strike yesterday, although the advice of the leader at the mass meeting, against violence, was generally followed. (T)he boys seem to be gaining confidence in the issue, and they declared yesterday that the opposition to their demands could not continue much longer. "Say, dem fellers ain't printen' papes fer der healt'," said one of the urchins, "an' I guess dey sees now dat wot we says goes. All t'ings comes to de blokes wot waits, an' say, we's good waiters, all right. I guess we'll get wot we wants."

"Kid" Blink was in a pacific frame of mind yesterday, and he was busy most of the day impressing is peaceful doctrines on some of the more riotously inclined strikers. "I'm t'inkin' erbout callin' a peace confrance," he said, "same like what de boss what runs Rusher done. Say, how's dat fer a skeme, hey? We'll decide just how many uv de little fellers has er right to tackle one uv dem big scabs, an' we'll guff a lot erbout de use uv sticks an' stones in de strike. Dat kind o' t'ing don't go no more in dis here strike. Dat's wot I tol 'em at de meetin', an' it goes!" . . . .

**Newsies 5.** "Kid' Blink Arrested" (*New York Daily Tribune*, July 28, 1899). "Kid" Blink was arrested last night and locked up on a charge of disorderly conduct. A crowd of boys was marching into Williams St., when the officers swooped down on them and took Blink to the Oak St. station. He was bailed out later, and came forth asserting that he would lead the strike with renewed bitterness. There was less sympathy for him than might have been expected, as the idea prevailed yesterday that he had accepted a bribe from one or both papers to put an end to the strike. He appeared in Park Row yesterday morning in a new suit of clothes, something that was not within memory of the oldest living newsboy. He was also said to have displayed a large roll of bills.

**Newsies 6.** "A Big Parade in Yonkers" (*New York Daily Tribune*, July 31, 1899). The newsboy strike of Westchester County, representing Yonkers, Mount Vernon, New-Rochelle and Mamaroneck, paraded through Yonkers last night. . . . The boys were accompanied by a brass band and a fife and drum corps. There was fully a thousand in line. . . . At Getty Square about two thousand citizens greeted them. Red lights flared and the sky rockets shot high in the air. The boys cheered and yelled themselves hoarse all along the line of march.

**Newsies 7.** "Newsboys' Boycott Over" (*New York Daily Tribune*, August 1, 1899). The newsboy' boycott against The Evening World and the Evening Journal seems to be at an end. Nearly every boy downtown is now handling the newspapers that were boycotted. The reason for the change, the boys say, is that they are permitted to make full returns.

## The “Newsies” in Pictures (1899)



1. Describe the people in this picture.
2. Why do you think they are selling newspapers?
3. In your opinion, why would they be willing to go on strike against the newspaper companies?



1. Who are the children in this picture?
2. Where was this picture taken?
3. In your opinion, why was this picture taken there?



1. What is the boy in the picture doing?
2. Look at his face. What do you think he is thinking?
3. In your opinion, why did newspaper companies hire young boys to do this job?



1. How is the boy in this picture dressed?
2. Who do you think the man is? Why?
3. Imagine a “dialogue” between the boy and the man. What do you think they are saying to each other?

**“Newsies” Project Ideas** *(This activity sheet and project ideas were developed by Rhonda Mormon, Carmelita Lopez, Melinda Melbourne, Maria Cruz and Stephanie Mitchell, participants in a Teaching American History Grant summer workshop)*

1. Write and perform a play about the “Newsies” or write and illustrate a “big book.”
2. Rewrite the newspaper quotations of the “Newsies” in standard English and then translate them into a contemporary dialect.
3. Write a poem, song or “rap” about the “Newsies” Strike.

## Documenting New York State Labor History

These documents allow teachers to use examples from New York State history to illustrate broader issues in the history of the American labor movement. Walt Whitman (1) offers a very positive view of industrial change. John Morrison (2) provides a much more negative view. The collection of newspaper stories on the Great Strike of 1877 (3) lend themselves to a document based essay on the role of labor unions. Samuel Gompers (4) and the 8 Hour Day campaign (5) focus on why workers organize unions. Jacob Riis (6) and Rose Schneiderman (7) discuss conditions for “working girls”. The Brooklyn Trolley Strike (8) offers students multiple perspectives on an event. The Great Steel Strike (9) and the Open Shop campaign (10) examine corporate responses to unions.

The documents were assembled and edited by Lee Burchett, Christian Caponi, Vincent Causman, Peter Dunn, Felicia Gillispie, Janet Gruner, Michael Levine, Nicholas Leone, Douglas Matina, Neil McCabe, Leigh McGrath, Laurie Moore, Pablo Muriel, Hanae Okita, Bobbie Robinson, Kyle Sabo, Jason Sarofsky, Eric Sutz, and Michelle Vevante.

### 1. I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman (circa 1850)

*Walt Whitman is considered by many to be the greatest American poet. He lived and worked in New York State for most of his life. In this poem he celebrates work and workers. It is from “Leaves of Grass,” first published in 1855. Compare Whitman’s view of industrialization with that offered by John Morrison in document 2.*

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand  
singing on the steamboat deck,  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,  
The wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the morning, or  
at noon intermission or at sundown,  
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of  
the girl sewing or washing,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day--at night the party of young fellows,  
robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

### 2. A Mechanic Describes Conditions for Workers in New York City (1883)

*John Morrison testified on August 28, 1883 to a U.S. Senate committee on the relations between Labor and Capital in the United States. Source: L. Litwack (1962). The American Labor Movement (Englewood Cliffs), 11-15.*

Q: What is the prospect for a man now working in one of these machine shops, a man who is temperate and economical, to become a boss or a manufacturer of machinery?

A: Well, speaking generally, there is no chance. They have lost all desire to become bosses now. The trade has become demoralized. First they earn so small wages; and next, it takes so much capital to become a boss now that they cannot think of it, because it takes all they can earn to live. . . I understand that at the present day you could not start in the machinist’s business to compete successfully with any of these large firms with a capital of less than \$20,000 or \$30,000.

### 3. The Great Railroad Strike of 1877

Many contemporaries viewed the Great Railroad Strike of July, 1877 as the first step in a class struggle that would plunge the United States into another civil war. The *New York Sun* recommended a “diet of lead for the hungry strikers.” In Brooklyn, New York, The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher denounced the strike and unions in sermons on July 23, 1877 and July 29, 1877. The Governor of New York and the Mayor of Albany threatened to use any force necessary to prevent disorder and to keep the railroads in operation. The strike started in West Virginia when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad cut wages by ten percent and it quickly spread across the nation. State and federal troops, local police and vigilantes were used to defeat the strikers. In Buffalo, New York, the militia was stoned by armed strikers who successfully shut down the rail terminal and lobbied other workers to call a general strike. In Hornellsville, New York, troops and strikers openly fraternized and authorities feared the military might switch sides. By August 2, overwhelmingly military force defeated the strikers and railroad operation resumed. **Sources:** Jeremy Brecher (1972). *Strike!* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books). Richard Boyer and Herbert Morais (1955). *Labor’s Untold Story* (New York: United Electrical Workers).

#### A. Proclamation by New York State Governor Lucius Robinson, July 22, 1877

Source: *Albany Argus*, July 24, 1877

I, Lucius Robinson, Governor of the State of New York, by virtue of the authority imposed upon me by the Constitution and the laws, command all persons engaged in such unlawful acts to desist therefrom, and I call upon all good citizens and upon all the authorities, civil and military, to aid in suppressing the same and in preventing breaches of the peace. The law recognizes and protects the right of all men to refuse to work except upon terms satisfactory to themselves, but it does not permit them to prevent other men from working who desire to do so. Unless the State is to be given up to anarchy, and its courts and laws are to be defied with impunity, its whole power must be exerted to suppress violence, maintain order, and protect its citizens in their right to work, and the business of the country from lawless interruption within our borders. It is no longer a question of wages, but of supremacy of the law, which protects alike the lives, the liberty, the property, and the rights of all classes of citizens. To the maintenance of that supremacy the whole power of the State will be invoked if necessary.

#### B. Matters At Albany Quiet -Vague Rumors Afloat, But Nothing Definite

Source: *Albany Argus*, July 23, 1877

Considerable excitement was manifested in this city yesterday and last night, relative to the great railroad strike. Alarming rumors were prevalent all day and crowds gathered around the telegraph office devouring with avidity all the rumors and telegraphic reports. Nothing as yet has transpired relative to a strike on the New York Central and Hudson River railroad. One rumor has it that twelve hundred men had gathered at West Albany which was killed by its own absurdity. The men at the West Albany shops have stood five reductions and as far as we can learn do not intend to strike. An *Argus* reporter visited West Albany last night but all was quiet and there was nothing to indicate any trouble.

#### C. Meeting at the Capital Park

Source: *Albany Argus*, July 25, 1877

During the afternoon a large number of idle persona gathered in the Capital park and on the approach of 4 o’clock they assembled about and on the steps of the Capital to the number of probably 1,000. . . . John Van Hoesen said that he was proud to see that the employees of the New York Central Railroad and the laboring men generally were not ashamed to meet here. He deprecated violence, but declared that the next move must be the compelling of the train men to join in the strike. He said, “There are men on the road who have offered violence; we have not. Other men had offered violence for the purpose of having the military sent to West Albany that we might be driven away and they get our places. Who is this Vanderbilt that he should pay as much for his breakfast as he pays ten men for their days work! We do wish to invite every man who has no capital but his two hands to join us.” . . . “We ask for bread and they are going to give us bullets. It might be that they will get bullets back” . . .

#### **D. Proclamation by Bleeker Banks, Mayor of Albany, New York**

Source: *Albany Argus*, July 27, 1877

It is represented to be upon the unquestionable authority, that workmen of the city, particularly employees of the railroad companies, are greatly pressed by evil-disposed and designing persons against their will and disposition to lawless and riotous conduct. I have entire confidence in the good citizenship and intelligence of the workmen of the city. They cannot desire the destruction of property, for which they themselves, as taxpayers, under the statutes of the State, must in part reimburse the owners. They certainly do not desire to do violence to the persons of their fellow-citizens. An attempt to incite them at such time as this to deeds of violence or disorderly conduct is a crime of the most despicable nature. . . . I should be recreant to my duty if I did not, in this connection, make known my firm intention to maintain the peace of the city with all the power at my disposal, and to arrest and punish all acts of lawlessness. And to that end, with a view of increasing the police force of the city, I do hereby invite all able-bodied male citizens, who are so disposed, to come forward and enroll themselves as policemen, at the City Hall, Mayor's office.

#### **E. Strike Updates from Poughkeepsie and Albany**

***Poughkeepsie Eagle*, July 26, 1877:** New York, owing to the great railroad strike, is short of meat, and wholesale dealers are scouring for cattle. Several of them came to this city yesterday and hiring conveyances hurried in the country in different directions. In New York the best cuts have advanced three cents per pound and there is a sudden and large rush in the demand for fish.

***Albany, Argus*, July 27, 1877:** The strike is having a serious effect on the manufacturers in Cohoes. The inconvenience of shipping is in itself a great annoyance, but the most important is that the consignors notify the consignees that the old time custom of remitting advance on receipt of the invoices will be discontinued, and advances will only be made on the actual receipt of goods; and goods are now stacked up that represent a large amount of money. The inconvenience of getting raw material will be soon felt if the strike continues, although it is not yet felt. If the strike should become more general in character in this vicinity, the stoppages of mills would become necessary, which would be an incalculable blow as now is the harvest of the knit good manufacture.

#### **F. Rev. Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn Opposes Unions**

Source: Leon Litwack, *The American Labor Movement* (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), 56-57.

A. What right had the working men, the members of those great organizations, to say to any one, 'You shall not work for wages which we refuse.' They had a perfect right to say to the employers, 'We shall not work for you,' but they had no right to tyrannize over their fellowmen. They had put themselves in an attitude of tyrannical opposition to all law and order and they could not be defended. The necessities of the great railroad companies demanded that there should be a reduction of wages. . . . It was true that \$1 a day was not enough to support a man and five children, if a man would insist on smoking and drinking beer. Was not a dollar a day enough to buy bread? Water costs nothing. Men cannot live by bread, it is true; but the man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live . . . . Thousands would be very glad of a dollar a day, and it added to the sin of the men on strike for them to turn and say to those men, 'You can do so, but you shall not.' There might be special cases of hardship, but the great laws of political economy could not be set at defiance (*The New York Times*, July 23, 1877).

B. We look upon the importation of the communistic and like European notions as abominations. Their notions and theories that the Government should be paternal and take care of the welfare of its subjects and provide them with labor, is un-American. It is the form in which oppression has had its most disastrous scope in the world. The American doctrine is that it is the duty of the Government merely to protect the people while they are taking care of themselves -- nothing more than that. . . . The European theories of combinations between workmen and trade-unions and communes destroy the individuality of the person, and there is no possible way of preserving the liberty of the people except by the maintenance of individual liberty, intact from Government and intact from individual meddling. Persons have the right to work when or where they please, as long as they please, and for what they please, and any attempt to infringe on this right, and to put good workmen on a level with poor workman -- any such attempt to regiment labor is preposterous (*The New York Times*, July 29, 1877).

#### 4. Samuel Gompers, New York City Cigarmaker (1864)

*Samuel Gompers was president of the American Federation of Labor for almost forty years. In his autobiography, he described work as a cigar making. Source: Gompers, S. (1925). Seventy Years of Life and Labor (NY: Dutton), in Mann, A. (1974), Immigrants in American Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), 88-89.*

For the first year and a half after we came to New York I worked with my father at home. Father paid a deposit for materials and worked at his bench at home instead of in a shop. At that time home work was not exploited as it was later under the tenement-house system. When I determined to find work outside, I had the self-confidence that goes with mastery of a trade. In hunting for a job, I chanced to fall in with another cigarmaker much older than I. Together we went from shop to shop until we found work. With a bit of nervousness but with sure, quick skill I made my first two cigars which the boss accepted and I became a permanent workman in the shop. . . .

The craftsmanship of the cigarmaker was shown in his ability to utilize wrappers to the best advantage, to shave off the unusable to a hairbreadth, to roll so as to cover holes in the leaf, and to use both hands so as to make a perfectly shaped and rolled product. These things a good cigarmaker learned to do more or less mechanically, which left us free to think, talk, listen, or sing. I loved the freedom of that work, for I had earned the mind-freedom that accompanied skill as a craftsman. I was eager to learn from discussion and reading or to pour out my feeling in song. Often we chose someone to read to us who was a particularly good reader, and in payment the rest of us gave him sufficient of our cigars so he was not the loser. The reading was always followed by discussion, so we learned to know each other pretty thoroughly. We learned who could take a joke in good spirit, who could marshall his thoughts in an orderly way, who could distinguish clever sophistry from sound reasoning. The fellowship that grew between congenial shopmates was something that lasted a lifetime. . . .

Any kind of an old loft served as a cigar shop. If there were enough windows, we had sufficient light for our work; if not, it was apparently no concern of the management. There was an entirely different conception of sanitation both in the shop and in the home of those days from now. The toilet facilities were a water-closet and a sink for washing purposes, usually located by the closet. In most cigar shops our towels were the bagging that came around the bales of Havana and other high grades of tobacco. Cigar shops were always dusty from the tobacco stems and powdered leaves. Benches and work tables were not designed to enable the workmen to adjust bodies and arms comfortably to work surface. Each workman supplied his own cutting board . . . and knife blade.

#### 5. The 8 Hour Day Campaign in Troy (1886)

*On May 1, 1886, about 350,000 workers in over 11,000 places of employment in the United States went on strike to secure an eight-hour work day. About 5,000 workers in the city of Troy, New York participated.*

**A. The New York Times, May 2, 1886:** This morning about 300 Italians employed by the Delaware and Hudson Company building a double track between Coon's Crossing and Ballston, struck for an increase of wages. They have been receiving \$1.10 per day, demanded \$1.25, and were offered \$1.15, which they refused to accept. After stopping work they tied red handkerchiefs to their pickaxes and shovels and marched down the track in a body to another place where a second gang was at work and induced them to join the strikers. A large number of Italians arrived from New York by boat this morning and proceeded to Round Lake to work on the railroad.

**B. The New York Times, May 18, 1886:** The great shirt, collar, and cuff manufacturers here closed tonight for an indefinite period, the employees of the Ide laundry having failed to return to work this morning. This is by far the most serious lockout or strike that has ever occurred in this city. It will affect every line of business miles around and beside the operatives, a great many farmers within a radius of 50 miles have been for years employed in the factories and twice as many other persons are dependent upon this industry in one way or another. The lockout will cause the paper box factories to suspend work. One manufacturer says that collars and cuffs are now being made quite extensively in France and Germany, and are retailed in this country at 12 cents a piece for an all linen four-ply collar. He said it was almost impossible now to compete with the European trade, and it prices of manufacturers could not dispose of their goods. Some dealers already refuse to sell goods made in this country, as they can sell foreign-made goods cheaper. Mr. Ide whose laundry employers struck says that the average earnings for the past year were over \$16 per week.

### 6. Working Girls of New York by Jacob Riis (circa 1900)

*Jacob Riis wrote about living and work conditions for New York City's immigrant poor. This selection is from How the Other Half Lives (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons), 234-239.*

It is estimated that at least one hundred and fifty thousand women and girls earn their own living in New York; but there is reason to believe that this estimate falls far short of the truth when sufficient account is taken of the large number who are not wholly dependent upon their own labor, while contributing by it to the family's earnings. These alone constitute a large class of the women wage-earners, and it is characteristic of the situation that the very fact that some need not starve on their wages condemns the rest to that fate. The pay they are willing to accept all have to take. What the 'everlasting law of supply and demand,' that serves as such a convenient gag for public indignation, has to do with it, one learns from observation all along the road of inquiry into these real women's wrongs. . . .

Cash-girls [sales girls] receiving \$1.75 [a week] for work that at certain seasons lengthened their day to sixteen hours were sometimes required to pay for their aprons. A common cause for discharge from stores in which, on account of the oppressive heat and lack of ventilation, 'girls fainted day after day and came out looking like corpses,' was too long service. No other fault was found with the discharged saleswomen than that they had been long enough in the employ of the firm to justly expect an increase of salary. The reason was even given with brutal frankness in some instances. . . .

The Women's Investigating Committee found the majority of the children employed in the stores to be under age, but heard only in a single instance of the truant officers calling. In that case they came once a year and sent the youngest children home; but in a month's time they were all back in their places, and were not again disturbed. When it comes to the factories where hard bodily labor is added to long hours, stifling rooms, and starvation wages, matters are even worse. . . .

### 7. We Have Found You Wanting by Rose Schneiderman (1911)

*Rose Schneiderman was an ILGWU organizer. She delivered this speech at a memorial service for the 140 young women who died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in New York City. It was published in The Survey, April 8, 1911.*

I would be a traitor to these poor burned bodies if I came here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting. The old Inquisition had its rack and its thumbscrews and its instruments of torture with iron teeth. We know what these things are today; the iron teeth are our necessities, the thumbscrews are the high-powered and swift machinery close to which we must work, and the rack is here in the firetrap structures that will destroy us the minute they catch on fire.

This is not the first time girls have been burned alive in the city. Every week I must learn of the untimely death of one of my sister workers. Every year thousands of us are maimed. The life of men and women is so cheap and property is so sacred. There are so many of us for one job it matters little if 146 of us are burned to death.

We have tried you citizens; we are trying you now, and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers, brothers and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us.

Public officials have only words of warning to us--warning that we must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back, when we rise, into the conditions that make life unbearable.

I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to save themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working-class movement.

### 8. Brooklyn Trolley Strike (1895)

*In January, 1895, 5,000 workers employed on Brooklyn, New York trolleys struck against the companies. On January 20, 1895, The New York Times reported that "From Bay Ridge to Hunter's Point, and East New York to Fulton Ferry, not a car for hours was running. 200 miles of railroad were idle and at no time were over 25 cars in operation on the rails which 900 cars had been traveling, as usual, the day before." The companies recruited "scab" labor and 7,000 state troopers and National Guard troops were dispatched to Brooklyn by Governor Morton to protect private property and break the strike. Mayor Schieren of Brooklyn issued a proclamation warning strikers and all other persons from congregating in public places during the strike. When workers responded by attacking trolleys and strikebreakers and fighting against soldiers, the strike became the focus of both the local and national press. The workers were finally defeated and the strike ended by the middle of February. This report is by a Special Committee of the New York State Assembly Appointed to Investigate the Causes of the Strike of the Surface Railroads in the City of Brooklyn, April 8, 1895. Do you think the Mayor and Governor should have used troops from the National Guard to break the strike? Explain.*



Source: [www.railroadextra.com/rtstbk01.Html](http://www.railroadextra.com/rtstbk01.Html)

The strike began on the 14th of January, 1895, and resulted in disorders which continued until about the 24th day of February, 1895. During the greater part of this time about 5,000 men, who had left their employment, remained, so far as your committee is able to ascertain, entirely unemployed. The operation of the surface railroads upon which the strike occurred was, for the time being, more or less completely paralyzed, and the fear of serious breaches of the public peace led to the calling out of the First and Second Brigades, N.G.S.N.Y. [National Guard State of New York].

Your committee have taken over 1,100 pages of testimony, representing all phases of the trouble and the conditions that brought about this great labor disturbance. It was no ordinary strike. It was a culmination of negotiations that had been going on between employer and employee for a period of eight years. Five thousand motormen, conductors, car-cleaners, switch-turners, truck men and other employees on four of the largest systems of street surface railroad, embracing nearly 50 different lines of cars had agreed to strike on Sunday evening, January 13, by vote of the executive board of the Knights of Labor, and, before the strike could be officially declared, and in anticipation of a general tie-up the next morning, the railroad companies took the precaution of dismissing until further orders, the pitmen and electrical workers in the various sheds, barns and shops where motor cars are housed and repaired. . . .

The companies advertised in Brooklyn, Boston, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, . . . and elsewhere in the United States, for employees. Men came from all parts of the country, and, as a result, the railroad companies were able entirely to reorganize their working staffs, although the strike of the former employees was not officially declared off until the 24th day of February.

During all of this time the community was receiving only a partial service at the hands of the companies: for the last fortnight, gradually approximating the usual and customary condition. During the greater part of this time, also, the municipal police force was, in the opinion of the mayor, inadequate to secure the public order, and peace was maintained by an armed military force ranging from 3,000 to 7,500 men.

The strike was declared by the Knights of Labor, District Assembly No. 75 and affected the employees of the Brooklyn Heights Railroad Company, Brooklyn, Queens County and Suburban Railroad Company, Brooklyn City and Newtown Railroad Company, and the Atlantic Avenue Railroad Company. The conductors and motormen of these companies were practically all members of the Knights of Labor, belonging to District Assembly No. 75.

A careful estimate shows that the loss to the employees who went out on the strike and who were wholly out of employment from the 13th of January to the 24th of February, was not less than \$350,000, and that the loss to these men as a body, the great majority of them being still unemployed may be estimated from the beginning of the strike to the date of this report at not less than \$750,000.

**Debating the Brooklyn Trolley Strike (1895)**

*Which of these statements about the Brooklyn Trolley strike (1895) do you believe come closer to the truth? Why? What example of bias do you find? Write a "letter-to-the-editor" in response to one of these statements.*

**Striker's Statement, Brooklyn Eagle (Jan. 21, 1895):** The employees of the Brooklyn trolley lines were driven from their posts by soulless corporations, because they were human beings and unable to work another year under the terrible strain put upon them by being compelled to run trolley cars through crowded streets at a high rate of speed for fourteen hours as a day's work. . . We offered to continue our contracts with our masters for another year at the same wages if we were guaranteed against more than ten hours' work. The companies refused. All our offers to arbitrate were cruelly rejected. The corporations . . . have terrorized the community with fabricated accounts of violence, and have failed to state that where such acts were committed it was at the instigation of the company's agent's. . . Miserable creatures have been recruited from the outcasts of other communities upon promise to pay them 50 per cent more wages than we ever received. The cars are not running, in spite of military and police, not because of our violence, but because the companies cannot get skilled labor to work for them upon their terms as to what shall constitute a day's work.

**Harper's Weekly (February 2, 1895):** Whether or not the wages paid by the Brooklyn street-car lines were inadequate, and whether or not their regulations were oppressive to the men, cannot be decided by rumor, by the resolutions of striking unions, nor by any evidence now before the public. These are proper questions for the State Labor Commissioners. . . We have no means of knowing whether the charges made by some of their former car-men are true, and it is surprising that many journals and some city officers, with no better information than ours, express passionate opinions on the subject. All such questions may be held in reserve for the present, in view of the serious crisis, involving the civil order of a great city, which has followed the strike, and which presents other issues vital to our national welfare, and to the safety of civilization itself.

**Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin:** The question at issue now in Brooklyn has ceased to be a question of the rights or wrongs of the street railway strikers, and has become a question of whether or not the laws shall be enforced to preserve the public peace.

**Editorial, Brooklyn Eagle (Jan. 21, 1895):** A great advance has been made when the president of a large corporation asserts that the corporation has some rights which it can insist upon. It has been common for the unions to do the insisting and they have acted as if business enterprises were undertaken solely for their benefit. . . The members of the unions have been in the habit of declaring that their employers must pay them wages at a fixed rate, regardless of the state of trade, and that they must have a certain number of hours for lunch and for sleep at the time which suits them, regardless of the demands made upon the business in which they are engaged. They say that business is conducted for the purpose of paying them wage and that it must be managed for their convenience rather than to secure a return upon the money invested. If the business of the road will not warrant their employment they should be discharged. The president of the corporation has no right to waste the money of which he is one of the trustees. If the men decide to strike, thus discharging themselves, they will make their folly complete.

**Providence Journal (Indiana):** It would appear from the comparative quiet in Brooklyn yesterday that the worst of the strike is over and that the next few days will be marked by the rather rapid petering out of the insolent endeavors of the strikers to win a victory by intimidation and violence. It was a hopeless endeavor . . from the start, and the surprising fact is that workingmen . . (T)he moment violence and lawlessness are resorted to, the end of the strike is close at hand and the failure of the strike is certain.

**Chicago Times (Illinois):** The fundamental trouble is not in the strike itself . . . The fault lies in the fact that a community through its corporate authorities has given away rights of the public . . in order that greedy, merciless corporations, . . shall increase the profits . . by reducing the labor employed to the minimum of wage and the maximum of hours, and when men thus unjustly treated cry out tumultuously about their wrongs the greedy monopolist, hiding himself from the public view, gains for his protection the militia, which appears ostensibly for the preservation of the public peace but really as the armed agent of a tyrannous corporation.

**9. The Great Steel Strike in Buffalo, New York (1919)**

*The 1919 steel strike threatened to develop into a militant national workers' movement including railroad workers and coal miners. The goal of the workers was to build industrial unions in the major mass production industries. It's primary organizer was William Z. Foster, a former member of the I.W.W. who later became a leading American communist. The strikers were defeated by the combined forces of American capital after a bitter three and a half month strike. At the time, Buffalo, New York was a major center for steel production. This article is from The New York Times, September 22, 1919.*

**Lackawanna Fears Violence, State Police to Aid Plant Guards in Buffalo District.**

Cautioning against violence, union leaders at mass meetings held today gave final instructions to the steel workers, who will meet at six o'clock in the morning. "If there is to be any bloodshed let the other side be responsible," said William J. Griffiths, A.F. of L. organizer, addressing a meeting at Lackawanna Temple. "Any of you men having weapons of any kinds go home and bury them and leave them buried until the trouble is over." The union leaders said that 70 percent of the men employed in the plants of the Lackawanna Steel Company, the Rogers-Brown Iron Company, the Donner Steel Company, and the Buffalo Slag Company would join the strike. Officials of the companies said they would keep their plants open and expect to have a force large enough to operate them. The four plants on which the strike is called employ 11,800 men. The Lackawanna Steel Company is the largest, with 9,000 workers. Smaller plants in the Buffalo district will not be affected tomorrow, the union leaders said, but an effort would be made to bring them into the strike later. . . .

Major George F. Chandler, commanding the state police, conferred today with the Chief of the Lackawanna Steel Company's private police force and with Mayor John. A. Toomey of Lackawanna, regarding steps for the protection of employees who are expected to continue work. It was announced that eight state troopers would be assigned to patrol the neighborhood of the plant. The Lackawanna has 185 specific guards and the Lackawanna police force has been increased. Mayor Toomey expressed doubt of the ability of the police to prevent disorder. He asserted that the sentiment of Lackawanna was opposed to the strike and warned outside agitators for sewing seeds of "Bolshevism" in the city. Lackawanna is said to be one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the United States. Hindus, Turks, Bulgarians, and Spaniards were among those at today's strike meeting. It is for the reason that the authorities fear disorder.

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### **10. The Open Shop Campaign in Rochester, New York (1921)**

*When Rochester workers struck in April, 1921 against a 15% wage cut, employers brought strikebreakers into the city. While the wage cut was eventually rescinded, the failure of the Rochester building trades unions to secure their broader demands illustrates the weakened position of the labor movement in Rochester, New York after World War I and the growing strength of anti-union "American Plan" employers across the country.*

#### **Labor Seeks to End Building Strikes.** *The New York Times*, May 8, 1921

The establishment of local wage conferences or adjustment boards throughout the country to prevent unnecessary strikes and lockouts in the building industry was urged by the Executive Council of the Building Trades Department at the meeting of the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor. Under the proposed plan, . . . arbitration of wage disputes is provided and sympathetic strikes in the behalf of unions making "unjustified demands" are prevented. It has already been successfully tried out in several cities, including Cincinnati, he said. "The new movement . . . will give stability to the industry and inspire confidence in the building and investment public." The proposed boards will be composed of representatives of the building contractors and the various unions. Wage scales for the various crafts will be established on an equitable basis, according to the merits of the trade. There will be no uniform scale. The board shall consider the question of advances or decreases in wages as general living conditions will permit.

#### **Rochester Rioters Shot. Fifty Persons Hurt in Fight Between Police and Strikers**

*The New York Times*, May 10, 1921

Quelling a riot of striking laborers in Trinidad Street today, several members of the police force were severely bruised, two rioters seriously shot, and fifty others, both men and women, wounded by riot sticks. It was the most serious outbreak of the building trades strike, which started here April 1. Two riot calls summoned the police reserves to the scene, where nearly 400 rioters, armed with bricks, stones, and clubs, had gathered. Before the reserves arrived, Patrolmen Fred A. Fricke and John W. Wagner were felled with stones. . . . The police learned that the riot was due to an attempt of the rioters to prevent the hauling of asphalt from the plant in the vicinity to be used in city street repairs.

#### **Eastman Urges Plan to Stabilize Building.** *The New York Times*, June 13, 1921

Asserting that the spirit of cooperation that had been displayed in this city . . . , George Eastman has launched a plan for stabilizing the building industry by eliminating strikes, reducing seasonal labor and equalizing rates of wages among the different trades involved. The plan calls for a Community Conference Board, with representatives from the workers, employers and general public to act as a research bureau, collect facts as regards labor conditions, plan building programs so that construction work can be spread out as much as possible, instead of being hurried to completion in a short rush season, and adjust differences between builders and their employer.

#### **Non-Union Men Beaten. Rochester Strikers Assault Five Structural Iron Workers With Bars**

*The New York Times*, June 19, 1921

Five non-union structural iron workers who had been working on the new Eastman School of Music Building, on Gibbs Street, this afternoon were waylaid . . . by a gang of union pickets and badly beaten. The strikers, about twenty in number, were armed with clubs and iron bars. They swooped down upon the five strike-beaters in automobiles and leaping into the street surrounding the quintet. When the five men had been beaten to the pavement the strikers fled.

## Brookwood Labor College, Katonah, New York (1921-1937)

by Leigh McGrath and Lee Burchett

During the 1920s, the American labor movement was under concerted attack from anti-union employers. Union membership dropped from a peak of 5 million members in 1920 to 3.6 million in 1923 and 2.9 million in 1933. Part of the labor movement's response to this attack was the founding of Brookwood Labor College as a residential college to train workers to become labor union organizers.

The philosophy of Brookwood drew its militancy from the socialist ideology of its faculty and union supporters, though it was not affiliated with any radical organizations. A. J. Muste, director of the college and chairman of the faculty, was a Christian Socialist who was trained as a Protestant minister. James H. Mauer, an important labor supporter, was President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor and a Socialist Party candidate for Vice President of the United States.

As an institution, Brookwood stressed social values rather than individual financial motives. Its goal was to recruit and train activists, journalists, teachers, and organizers for the labor and farm movements. To achieve this goal, Brookwood offered a two-year residential program that included theoretical and practical courses that provided students with the broad historical background of the labor movement as well as instruction in keeping minutes, writing resolutions, organizing strikes, setting up relief organizations, and other organizing techniques. Its history courses focused on the role of the masses. In economics, students studied subjects such as child labor, unemployment, banking, credit, and other areas needed to be a labor union leader. According to A.J. Muste, Brookwood wanted to be recognized as a respectable institution of learning. Highlights of the Brookwood program included its student newspaper, *The Brookwood Review*, frequent debates, lectures by prominent scholars and labor and radical leaders, and theatrical productions.

Brookwood recruited students who were activists and wanted to service to their fellow workers. Admission was relatively simple. Applicants were required to be wage earners, but not necessarily union members. They needed three references that vouched for their commitment to the labor movement. At one point, Brookwood was supported by thirteen national and international labor unions. The unions provided scholarships and recommended students who they hoped would return to lead other workers in their industries.

Len De Caux, a Brookwood student who later was a reporter for a labor union press and worked in the national office of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, described Brookwood as "beautiful. . . To the miner, Brookwood was green, clean, all above ground - no coal dust, no cricks in the back. To the machinist, Brookwood was greaseless days far from the grinding roar of metal against metal. To makers of suits, dresses, hats, Brookwood was fairytale country to which they were wand-wafted from the square, treeless hills, the trash-strewn cement valleys of Manhattan or Chicago. To those who had known poverty, Brookwood offered ease, security, the fresh air pleasures of the well-to-do. Spiritually, Brookwood was a labor movement in microcosm without bureaucrats or racketeers- with emphasis on youth, aspirations, ideals."

Ideological differences with more conservative forces in the labor movement eventually contributed to the collapse of Brookwood Labor College. In 1928, the American Federation charged that Brookwood was teaching communist ideas and ordered AFL affiliates to withdraw support. The situation grew worse during the Great Depression as unemployment soared, money was scarce, and labor education did not seem to offer solutions to the desperate problems faced by the American working class. The final blow to the labor college occurred in 1934 when the Board of Trustees of Bryn Mawr College forced Brookwood's summer school to leave the campus in response to charges that it was supporting local strikes.

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## Activity Sheet: Brookwood Labor College, Katonah, New York

### A. Labor Activist Explains the Curriculum of Brookwood Labor College

Source: "Labor Statesmen's Alma Mater Open," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1921

"This is not a propagandist institution, it does not preach violence," said Mr. Muste, the director of the college. "I do not think there is even a member of the socialist party on the faculty, although there would be no objection if there were. Our aims are purely educational and we claim to be a respectable institution of learning. In the first year there will be a course in history, the history of civilization, so as to show the social forces at work through the masses. In English, we will give them what they need. Some have sufficient English training, others lack in practical experience so that they are not able to grasp economic problems."

"There will be a course in argumentation so that they may learn to express what they wish clearly and logically. There will be a debate once a week, and the next day a two hour session will be given over to criticism not only of the effectiveness of the argument but also the soundness of presentation. In economics we will take up such subjects as child labor, unemployment, banking, credit control, and other branches necessary to a proper development of a labor leader. For our textbooks in this course we will have the standard works, of course, but will depend largely on reports, statistics, and other first hand data from which to draw our conclusions. In the second year most of the work will be specialized although there may be some who need further instruction in the fundamentals. There will be courses in social psychology, and for those who wish to specialize in labor organization a course in labor tactics. The person wishing to study statistics will devote most of his time to that and for those who intend to enter farm and labor journalism instructors in that work will be provided."

### B. Student Remembers Brookwood Labor College

Source: De Caux, Len (1970). *Labor Radical*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 95.

Len De Caux: "Brookwood was beautiful. . . To the miner, Brookwood was green, clean, all above ground - no coal dust, no cricks in the back. To the machinist, Brookwood was greaseless days far from the grinding roar of metal against metal. To makers of suits, dresses, hats, Brookwood was fairytale country to which they were wand-wafted from the square, treeless hills, the trash-strewn cement valleys of Manhattan or Chicago. To those who had known poverty, Brookwood offered ease, security, the fresh air pleasures of the well-to-do. Spiritually, Brookwood was a labor movement in microcosm without bureaucrats or racketeers- with emphasis on youth, aspirations, ideals."

### C. "Culture Shock" at Brookwood Labor College

Source: Richard J. Altenbaugh, *Education For Struggle*

"A Miner from the Middle West, looking over his fellow students for the first time, asked, "What are these Jewish girls doing here? There ain't no Jews in the labor movement." The needle trades unions were completely unknown to him and he was even more surprised when the girls not only outshone him on labor theory - of which, in truth, he had very little - but even in discussions of labor tactics on which he considered himself an authority. The girls, too, soon had to revise their opinion of the miner and acknowledge that lack of sophistication did not betoken hopeless ignorance."

### Questions:

1. How does Mr. Muste try to prove that the labor college is a respectable institution of learning?
2. How do the courses provide students with the knowledge needed to become labor leaders?
3. According to Len De Caux, what did Brookwood offer students that made it beautiful?
4. Why are some of the students surprised by the diversity they find at Brookwood?
5. In your opinion, how does education at Brookwood support the growth of the American labor movement?

## Labor Issues in World War I Era Rochester, New York

by Bobbie Robinson and Janet Gruner

Rochester, New York is just one American city among dozens in which the struggles of workers in the early twentieth century illustrate the depth of class conflict across the country. Unions were most successful in the building trades, shoe and clothing industries, and breweries. By 1913, the Rochester Central Trades represented 60 local unions. Combined with 17 non-affiliated unions, they had approximately 15,000 members and represented almost twenty percent of the city's wage earners. Between ten and fifteen thousand workers participated in the city's annual Labor Day parade and as a sign of the city's importance to the national labor movement, the American Federation of Labor held its annual meeting in Rochester's Convention Hall in 1912 (Naparsteck, 1989: 23-24).

On the other side of the class dividing line, Rochester had more than 40 manufacturers in its Clothiers Exchange, who fought a series of bitter battles to stymie union organizing. Owners were often able to prevent strikes by threatening to shut down entire industries. In 1912, workers refused to be swayed by this threat and went out on a prolonged and bitter strike that erupted into violence that killed a 17 year-old woman. Strikers and management finally settled on a 52-hour workweek, time-and-a-half for overtime, five legal holidays, and no discrimination against workers involved in union activities. The settlement failed, however, to earn recognition for the union. Recognition for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers had to wait until World War I (McKelvey, 1963: 22).

The years of World War I saw relative labor peace. The closing of immigration and the removal of 4 million men from the workforce to serve in the armed services led to a shortage of workers and a resulting rise in wages. Factories ran at full capacity, and the government knew that the war effort could not afford disruptions to production (Rayback, 1966: 274-75). "A War Labor Board was organized by a conference of labor leaders and manufacturers and was highly active in quickly and peacefully settling disputes. In just a few months in 1918, the board settled over 1,250 cases affecting more than 700,000 workers, almost always ruling in favor of the workers. As a result, unionized workers made huge gains in wages. The end of the war brought new challenges to labor as peace caused economic

disruption and international events ushered in an era of fear and distrust.

At first, post-war spending of savings on consumer goods led to an economic boom, but by 1920, shortages of these goods led to inflation so that the cost of living in 1920 was twice that of 1913. "Inflation in turn produced labor trouble. The unions, grown strong during the war, struck for wage increases. Over four million workers, one out of five in the labor force, were on strike at some time in 1919. Work stoppages aggravated shortages, triggering further inflation and more strikes. Then came one of the most precipitous economic declines in American history. Between July 1920 and March 1922 prices, especially agricultural prices, plummeted. Unemployment soared" (Garraty, 1998: 659). The good will generated during the war would soon be tested in several industries, including construction, clothing, and shoe manufacturing.

The shoe manufacturers of Rochester had prospered during the war by producing shoes for women and children while factories in other cities produced shoes and boots for soldiers. The United (Shoe Workers of America) developed real strength in Rochester during the war when the tight labor market and the competition for skills prompted most manufacturers to deal openly and generously with their employees...Both management and labor had prospered handsomely during the war that neither wished to disturb the situation for a year or two after its close. Thus, in May 1921, the Rochester Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Association and the local officials of the United Shoe Workers of America, representing over 4,000 Rochester workers, jointly agreed to continue the existing wage schedules for another year and to create a wage adjustment board to handle any wage questions arising out of changes in style or work methods (McKelvey 1953: 21).

Within a few months, however, the workers, harshly affected by the inflation afflicting the country, sought to break this agreement and demanded higher wages. Orders had slowed, and management balked at the union's demands. A strike brought no concessions from the union and was finally broken. Many of the manufacturers would never recover; by the end of 1921, three of the city's nine shoe companies had closed down. The weakness of the labor movement in Rochester is also

demonstrated by the failure of the building trades to achieve their objectives during a 1921 strike. Industrialists demanded a fifteen percent wage cut. Strike breakers were brought in leading to multiple confrontations. While the wage cut was later rescinded, the strike was not seen as a victory for the workers.

Perhaps more serious than the economic downturn to the fate and future of workers and unions was a social phenomenon termed the "Red Scare." The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the spread of its ideas through Europe after World War I triggered widespread fear throughout the United States. Anything that smacked of socialism became a target of suspicion, including the pleas and demands of workers for rights and a say about their working conditions. In 1919, the New York State Legislature created the joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities. The Lusk Committee, as it was called, encouraged informers to report on the suspicious activities of their friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Reports came in from New York City, Binghamton, Buffalo, Utica, and Rochester. The committee conducted raids on the headquarters of suspect organizations, conducted public hearings, and collected over 3,000 pages of testimony. The committee was short-lived, issuing its final report in April 1920, but while active, it served to add to the fear and distrust of the Red Scare.

Ironically, it may have been the efforts of Rochester's leading industrialist that had the most profound effect on organized labor's progress in Rochester. George Eastman, inventor and entrepreneur, founded the company that would become Eastman-Kodak. Eastman's workforce produced photography equipment, was technically skilled, and thus was highly prized. Eastman championed an approach to labor relations known as the "American Plan." He attempted to prevent the unionization of his workers by offering them higher than standard wages, a shorter work day (nine hours in 1916) and fringe benefits, including dining rooms, restrooms with lockers, reading rooms, recreational facilities, a retirement fund and emergency hospital quarters in each of the larger factories. Rochester's other employers watched Eastman closely, and many offered their employees similar incentives and benefits, thus preventing unionization in these companies (Naparsteck, 1989: 19).

Eastman was also a philanthropist and generous benefactor for the city, building museums, hospitals,

dental clinics, and founding a school of music. He took the lead in organizing the community to schedule construction projects throughout the year and prevent off-season loss of construction jobs. He created a community fund to which other industrialists contributed. Funds were used to help workers in need, and during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the fund helped to stave off the worst effects from reaching Rochester for several years. Rochester found in this patron an advantage other American cities did not share.

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## Activity Sheet: George Eastman - Businessman and Philanthropist

George Eastman was the founder of the company that became Eastman Kodak, one of the largest manufacturers of cameras and photographic equipment in the world. The company was the most important employer in Rochester and Eastman became the city's most influential business and civic leader. At a time when labor and management disagreed about many issues, Eastman developed his own plans for dealing with his workers. Source: <http://www.kodak.com/us/en/corp/aboutKodak/kodakHistory>.

### A. George Eastman – Businessman

George Eastman blended human and democratic qualities, with remarkable foresight, into the building of his business. He believed employees should have more than just good wages - a way of thinking that was far ahead of management people of his era. Early in his business, Eastman began planning for "dividends on wages" for employees. His first act, in 1899, was the distribution of a substantial sum of his own money - an outright gift - to each person who worked for him. Later he set up a "Wage Dividend," in which each employee benefited above his or her wages in proportion to the yearly dividend on the company stock.

Eastman felt that the prosperity of an organization was not necessarily due to inventions and patents, but more to workers' goodwill and loyalty. In 1919, Eastman gave one-third of his own holdings of company stock - then worth \$10 million - to his employees. Still later came the fulfillment of what he felt was a responsibility to employees with the establishment of retirement annuity, life insurance, and disability benefit plans.

Carl W. Ackerman, his biographer, writing in 1932, said: "Mr. Eastman was a giant in his day. The social philosophy, which he practiced in building his company, was not only far in advance of the thinking during his lifetime, but it will be years before it is generally recognized and accepted."

### B. George Eastman - Philanthropist

George Eastman is almost as well known for his philanthropy as he is for his pioneering work in photography. He began giving to non-profit institutions when his salary was only \$60 a week, with a donation of \$50 to the young and struggling Mechanics Institute of Rochester (now the Rochester Institute of Technology). He was an admirer of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology because he had hired some of its graduates and gave that university anonymous gifts totalling \$20 million. Because of his concern for the education of African Americans, he to the Hampton and the Tuskegee Institutes. Eastman believed that "The progress of the world depends almost entirely upon education."

Dental clinics were also of great interest to Eastman. He devised complete plans and financial backing for a \$2.5 million dental clinic for Rochester. He then started a large-scale, remedial dental program for children. When asked why he favored dental clinics, he replied, "I get more results for my money than in any other philanthropic scheme. It is a medical fact that children can have a better chance in life with better looks, better health and more vigor if the teeth, nose, throat and mouth are taken proper care of at the crucial time of childhood." He also brought to fruition a program to develop a medical school and hospital at the University of Rochester.

Eastman loved music and wanted others to enjoy the beauty and pleasure of music. He established and supported the Eastman School of Music, a theatre, and a symphony orchestra. "It is fairly easy to employ skillful musicians. It is impossible to buy appreciation of music. Yet without a large body of people who get joy out of it, any attempt to develop musical resources of any city is doomed to failure," he said. So his plan had a practical formula for exposing the public to music - with the result that the people of Rochester have for decades supported their own philharmonic orchestra.

## **Manny Fried of Buffalo, NY: A Lifetime Commitment to Workers' Rights**

by Robert J. Heffern

Emmanuel (Manny) Fried has lived a life committed to workers and their rights. During his long life he worked in chemical and aircraft plants, was an actor and author, taught speech, acting and creative writing, served in the military, and was a union organizer. He was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) twice because of his radical ideas and affiliations. His story challenges many of the stereotypes people have about Communists and labor radicals in the United States.

Manny was born in 1913, the seventh of nine children. His parents were immigrants from what is now known as the Republic of Slovakia. His father was a cigarmaker and a follower of Daniel DeLeon, an early American socialist. The Fried family moved to Buffalo, New York in 1918. While in high school, Manny worked nights at a local hotel and after graduation he worked at the Dupont Chemical company to save money for college. Manny sent his high school sports clippings to the University of Iowa, which had a theater department, and received a scholarship to play on the freshman football team. However, when he did not receive a scholarship for the next season, he was forced to leave college and return to Buffalo.

Manny did some walk-ons and workshops as an actor and was offered an apprenticeship in the Catskills. He gravitated to plays with labor themes and auditioned with the Theater of Action. In 1936, he was politicized and joined the Communist Party. While he considered this time as an actor and activist a wonderful experience, he ran out of money and returned home to Buffalo. He attended Canisius College where he played football, but quit school and went to New York City with the hope of pursuing a professional acting career. He had a small part with John Garfield in "Having a Wonderful Time," but could not earn enough money to continue. Again he returned to Buffalo. He became the artistic director of the Buffalo Contemporary Theater. It was sponsored by the New Theatre League, a project that coordinated political plays aimed at educating and entertaining workers.

With the start of World War II, Manny went to work for Curtiss Wright Aircraft as a metal worker. He joined the company union, but was elected as a leader of an opposition faction organized by the United Auto Workers (UAW). Although he became a skilled craftsman, he was transferred between the two plants because of his union activity. A white line was drawn around his work bench and other workers were instructed not to cross it. Finally, in 1941, the Army Air Force had him removed from the plant as a subversive. At this point, Manny went to work for the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE) union as an organizer.

Manny enlisted in the Army in 1944 and was sent to officers training school to become a second lieutenant. He was stationed in Korea after the Japanese surrender where he realized that his company commanders had been told to watch him as a "subversive." After Korea and a stop in New York City, he returned to Buffalo as a UE organizer. The UE had a reputation as a radical union. It was thrown out of the CIO because it supported Henry Wallace against Truman and Dewey in the 1948 Presidential election. Manny always felt that UE was more democratic than other unions because no strike decision was made unless argued over and approved by rank and file workers.

In 1954, HUAC ordered Manny to testify before a committee that was meeting in Albany. He believes this was done to weaken the UE, which had a large following at General Electric plants in nearby Schenectady. A short time later District 3 of the UE merged with the Machinists' unions, but many UE officials were purged by the Machinist in 1956. Local 326 put Manny Fried on trial and they were given copies of his FBI dossier. Manny also testified before HUAC when a committee visited Buffalo in 1964. On both occasions, he challenged the committee for violating freedom guaranteed by the United States Constitution.

After leaving UE, Manny supported his family as an insurance broker and wrote plays and short stories with labor themes. Eventually, he returned to college where he earned a Ph.D. in English Literature. He taught creative writing for many years at Buffalo State College, wrote five plays that were produced in off-Broadway theaters plays and a total of twelve that were performed in the Buffalo and other cities.

Emmanuel Fried has been named one of *One Hundred Most Influential Western New Yorkers in the Twentieth Century* by WGRZ-TV. He received the *Joe Hill Award* from the national AFL-CIO for lifetime contribution to the cause of labor through the arts and the *Peace Award* from the Western New York Peace Center for lifetime dedication "to the cause of peace and to the struggle of social justice." The Western New York Coalition for Economic Justice gave him its first lifetime achievement award.

## The Lower East Side Tenement Museum

by Lynda Kennedy

“They all were in here?” asked a teenager while trying not to bump into anything in the crowded tenement apartment. The surprise in his voice is warranted, as it is hard to imagine Jennie Levine raising her children in the cramped space while her husband Harris and other workers sewed clothes in the front room and pressed them for shipping in the kitchen. The entire apartment, front room, kitchen and bedroom is a mere 325 square feet. The story of the Levine family, immigrant garment workers who lived and worked in this apartment in the late 1800’s, was one of the exhibits explored by students from Paul Robeson High School in Brooklyn at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. The visit tied in with their classroom work where they were discussing immigration and the labor movement in the United States. The trip was arranged through the Gateway to the City Project, a Teaching American History Grant funded program, designed to expose social studies teachers and their students to the history resources in New York City.

Adam Stevens, a social studies teacher from Robeson High School and a second year Gateway participant, squeezed the trip to the Tenement Museum into a crowded United States history curriculum because he believed the experience would ultimately enhance his students’ preparation for Advanced Placement and state standardized exams. Standing in the crowded Levine apartment, feeling the stuffiness and seeing the efforts taken by the laborers to make this space not only a place of business, but also a home, is worth a thousand pictures or written descriptions. Students also took a walking tour of the area surrounding the museum where they acted as historians gathering and evaluating evidence of the past that still lurks in nearly every New York City neighborhood.



Apartment, L.E.S. Tenement Museum

Part of the success of the Gateway to the City Project has been the collaboration between teachers and museum educators. This has made it possible for students to learn by doing as they become personally engaged with the material culture of the past and test out their own ideas and explanations about history. Because it does not solely rely on printed sources, this approach to history instruction supports students with a variety of learning styles. Students are also encouraged to dialogue about their observations, comparing the past they are studying with their own experiences. For a few of the Robeson students, having a living room couch that becomes a bed where a couple of kids regularly sleep, is something they are already familiar with. Others had seen their grandmothers use a flat iron in their home country. As these students learned more about the past, it suddenly became full of people like themselves, human, heroic and frail by turns. These were regular people, some living in extraordinary circumstances, some living fairly ordinary lives, but all of them important for understanding history.

Watching these students excitedly discuss what they learned at the Tenement Museum, I had no doubt that they would perform well on state-mandated tests. I was also struck by what they would now be able to explain to their siblings, parents and friends. For example, those little pipes sticking out of the walls in their apartment buildings are the remains of old gas fixtures. Maybe they will stop for a moment on their street and imagine what it was like at the turn of the last century and contemplate the changes. The power of place is everywhere in New York City and as a result of their visit to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, these students tapped into it.

**To learn more about the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, visit its web site at <http://www.tenement.org>, where you can take a “virtual” tour.**

## **Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University**

The Tamiment Institute Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives form a unique center for scholarly research on labor history, and the history of socialist, anarchist, communist and other radical political movements. Utopian experiments, women's movements, struggles for civil rights and liberties, and other forms of radical activity are also documented in this growing collection. Although the focus of Tamiment/Wagner holdings is the United States since 1865, most of the movements documented were consciously international in outlook. A substantial amount of material produced in Great Britain, Canada and other foreign countries may be found in Tamiment/Wagner collections. The Tamiment Institute Library was originally the Meyer London Library of the Rand School of Social Sciences, the pioneer workers' school in the United States, founded in 1906. The Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives was created in 1977 as a repository for the historically significant records of New York City labor organizations. It is co-sponsored by the Tamiment Institute and the New York City Central Labor Council of the AFL-CIO. Programs include exhibits, workshops, conferences, lectures, publications, etc. The library and archives promote historical and archival awareness and provide advice to the labor and progressive communities on the management and preservation of their non-current records.

Both collections are open to the public at the New York University Bobst Library at Washington Square Park South. Hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. weekdays. Weekend and evening hours vary. During the summer the collections are open regular hours Monday through Thursday, and on Friday by appointment only. For information, call (212) 998-2630. A catalog is available on-line through BobCatPlus (login as bobcat).

**LIBRARY COLLECTIONS:** The Tamiment Institute Library has a non-circulating book collection of more than 20,000 titles covering a broad spectrum of leftwing and labor topics. The library receives more than current 500 U.S. and foreign serial titles including scholarly journals, magazines and newspapers produced by a broad range of labor and political organizations.

**ARCHIVAL AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS:** Between them, the Tamiment Institute Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives hold more than 300 manuscript collections and a total of more than 15,000 feet of original papers and records. Detailed guides and inventories for these collections may be consulted at the library. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) collection has been acquired by the Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Archives. The collection, the largest and most important resource for the study of the participation of American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, consists of c. 300 feet of manuscript material and more than 5,000 photographs, as well as audio tapes, film and video, posters and artifacts. The ALBA collection is open for research by appointment. The Archives of Irish America, a part of the Tamiment Library, has its own webpages.

**PHOTOGRAPHS:** Tamiment/Wagner's photographic collections contain over 225,000 images of individuals and events connected with labor and radical history, particularly that of New York City.

**GRAPHIC MATERIALS:** The Library has a poster and broadside collection of 2,000+ items, a number of original paintings, drawings and cartoons, and 3,500 political buttons, as well as t-shirts, banners, bumper stickers and other artifacts and ephemera.

**MOVING IMAGES:** About 100 video documentaries and feature films dealing with labor history and radical politics have been acquired through funding by the Jacob Blaugar Endowment and the New York State Council on the Arts, as well as by direct donation. Two videos produced by the Wagner Labor Archives, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: The Rebel Girl, and They Were Not Silent: The Jewish Labor Movement and the Holocaust are also available for viewing.

**ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS:** Tamiment/Wagner oral history collections include more than 1,500 taped interviews conducted by or donated to the Library, as well as audiotapes of speeches, concerts, conferences, memorial meetings, union meetings and other public and private events. Transcripts or summaries are available for many oral history interviews.

## Brooklyn Works: 400 Years of Making a Living in Brooklyn

[www.brooklynhistory.org/main/brooklyn\\_works.html](http://www.brooklynhistory.org/main/brooklyn_works.html)

Brooklyn Works celebrates four centuries of astonishing enterprise, ingenuity, change and continuity. This family-centered, interactive exhibition is about the working people of Brooklyn, their occupations, the many challenges they faced, their resilience, and how Brooklyn's workforce contributed to shaping the nation. The stories of working in Brooklyn are told in the actual words of individuals from the past including: Walt Whitman, an early farmer, an enslaved laborer of the 1790s, an Irish ropemaker on strike in the 1830s, a Jewish garment worker, a 19th century real estate developer and warehouse owner, an early 20th century assembly line worker, and an African American firefighter.

When you visit the Brooklyn Works exhibit on-line or at the Brooklyn Historical Society, you will be transported back to neighborhoods that reflect different periods of Brooklyn's growth. You will experience what it was like to work on the farms, docks, factories or shops in Brooklyn. The Brooklyn Historical Society is located at 128 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201 (718-222-4111).



## **World War II Transforms Work Opportunities For Women**

As the United States entered World War II, additional workers were needed to produce weapons and materials for the war effort. A serious “manpower” shortage opened the door for an infusion of “womanpower” on jobs and in many industries that had previously only employed men. Women workers were not new to the U.S. work force. In 1940, 27.9% of U.S. workers were women and 51.5% of these women workers were either married, widowed or divorced. The war started to change the way that Americans saw the role of women in production. By 1944, 36.3% of the U.S. work force was female and 59.1% of these women workers were either married, widowed or divorced.

On Long Island during World War II, large numbers of women workers were needed in important industries. Rural areas of Suffolk County recruited women as agricultural workers. The Grumman plant in Bethpage needed to replace thousands of male employees on the assembly lines that were building the Wildcat fighter and the Avenger torpedo plane. The wartime demand for workers meant that women had new opportunities for job training and for employment on jobs that paid high salaries.

New possibilities for women also created new problems. Women and men both had to rethink traditional ideas about what they considered women’s work and the proper role of women on the job, in the family and in society. Companies were concerned about how well men and women would work together. Many Long Island women repented to these challenges by becoming outstanding workers. Use the information in this document package to answer the question: “How did World War II transform work opportunities for women on Long Island, NY?”

### **A. Farmerettes Will Stage Comeback in Suffolk County (Babylon Leader, January 29, 1942)**

Farmerettes will stage a comeback in Suffolk County next summer. They’ll stage a comeback because farmerettes are going to be the only solution to what farm prognosticators say will be by midsummer a “semi-acute” shortage of farm labor. . . . Deferment of farm workers from the draft will help the situation but will fall far short of solving the problem; nor will recruitment of farm workers from draft rejects, boys under draft age, and men over draft age provide a solution. . . . Even counting draft deferments, and the men and boys not now working on farms who can be induced to go “back to the land”, Suffolk County still will need a minimum of 3,000 additional farm workers during the summer of 1942, conservative estimates indicate. That means at least 3,000 farmerettes. It means convincing at least 3,000 Suffolk County women preferably young, strong, unmarried women - that the best way to serve their country is to don overalls and go “down to the farm”. Patriotism . . . will be the only motive which can persuade potential farmerettes to put up with callouses on their hands, dirt under their fingernails, sunburn on their noses, and aches in their backs. . . . Volunteer farmerettes must be ready to do men’s work to the best of their abilities; dilettante debutantes definitely not wanted!

### **B. There’s No Stopping ‘Em, Fellow (Newsday, September 17, 1942)**

First it was war plants, then the Army, then the Navy, then the air ferry service - and now women have invaded one of the last male strongholds, the filling station. The Gulf Oil Corp. has set up a school at its station at Lond Beach Rd. and Seaman Ave., Rockville Centre, to teach girls how to pump gas, wipe windshields, change and fill tires, change oil, do a grease job and perform all the other little tasks and courtesies expected of good station attendants. The girls are paid while they learn, and when they’ve completed the training course successfully, they’ll take over Gulf stations all over the County as male attendants are drafted or lured away by war jobs.

### **C. Women Cut Class Time (Farmingdale Post, October 8, 1942)**

Women are adapting themselves to aircraft work so rapidly and well that many of them become fully qualified for employment after as little as two and a half weeks of training. . . . “Although the course has been cut to four weeks, still further savings of time can be brought about, for when we see that the student has had enough learning to do a job we give her one, “ Morgan C. Monroe, employment manager at Republic Aviation Corporation, Farmingdale, asserted. While many women have responded patriotically to the training and

placement offered at the 10 schools which supply Republic Aviation with personnel, there still remains a need for many more workers.

**D. Women Working 58 Hours a Week (Republic Aviation, November, 1942)**

A 58 hour work week for women was instituted this week at Republic Aviation's Farmingdale Plant as a measure which will remain in effect until an adequate number of workers are experienced enough to assure continuation of the increased flow of production now resulting from the cycle system. The new work week is in effect in those departments where emergency production is required in connection with the newly installed cycle system. It was pointed out by Republic production men that this system calls for co-ordinated teams who move from jig to jig at specified intervals, each worker performing a certain number of operations in the time allocated.

**E. Local Western Union Hires First Girl As Messenger "Boy" (Hempstead Sentinel, Dec. 3, 1942)**

The Western Union office on Main Street now has a girl messenger "boy." She is Mary Gerehan, a senior at Hempstead high school. She gets around the village with her messages on a bicycle. Miss Gerehan is the first girl engaged by the Western Union office for this type of work. She still goes to school but works afternoons and on Saturdays and Sundays.

**F. Radio Program To Recruit Women Workers At Grumman (Farmingdale Post, February 4, 1943)**

The nation's need for several million more women to replace men experienced in aircraft assembly lines is so pressing that on Monday night, February 8, the radio program VOX POP will begin a drive. The initial broadcast will be from the plant of the Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation at Bethpage from 8:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Several thousand Grumman male workers, most of them residents of Nassau and Suffolk Counties, have entered the armed services and the company has been making a valiant effort to replace them with women from Long Island. In hundreds of cases, the patriotic women relatives of these former Grumman workers, have entered the plant to fill the places formerly held by the men..

**G. Mary Marden Fights with Him on the Ranger Assembly Line (Babylon Leader, Feb. 4, 1944)**

When Mary gave up her stenographic job in a law office to marry Bill Marden, she thought she was through working for anyone but Bill. Bill worked at Ranger. Even when war came, the only experimental tests she planned were those in child care that developed when their baby, Delphine, arrived. But Bill joined the Air Force in January a year ago. Today he is piloting a P-40 somewhere overseas. Last March, three months after Bill joined up, Mary joined up too. She came to Ranger and entered the Training School. After completing her course she took over the job that Bill had left. Today she is at the controls of one of the test cells, preparing engines for stationary operation and recording their performance on test. Bill and Mary Marden are both working for Victory. Delphine, now five years old, plays in her home on Knolltop Road, while her mother is at work, cared for by a young woman whose husband is in the Marine Corps.

**H. USES Issues Hurry Call For 4,000 War Workers (Newsday, May 12, 1944)**

A hurry call for more than 4,000 workers for Nassau's war plants was issued yesterday by Lester M. Cooley, chief of the Hempstead branch of the United States Employment Service. Particularly needed, Cooley said, are thousands of engineers, and either full time or part time clerks, typists, stenographers and secretaries. They're needed at once because a number of the plants in this area are currently designing new models of war products - an operation that requires greatly increased staffs. In order to lure workers for the white collar jobs, Cooley said that college students and teachers will be accepted for employment during their vacation periods. Housewives, too, will be welcomed, even if they can give no more than four hours a day at the plant. . . . While both men and women may qualify for the jobs, Cooley said he expected his biggest responses to come from women who discover they have part of a day to give to producing war materials. "The plants are now working on plans to supply transportation service for new workers," he said. "As far as is possible, the road to these jobs will be made easy."

**I. Tuck Hair Into Safety Cap and Avoid Scalping (Republic Aviation, 1945)**

Realizing the pride a woman takes in her tresses, whether they be blonde, auburn or brunette, the Safety Division has issued a warning to women handling dangerous equipment, particularly that of a revolving nature, to tuck their hair into a safety cap. Stray locks are especially perilous around hand drill motors. Aside from the

beauty angle, a partial scalping is a painful experience and an unnecessary one. So keep 'em covered. Then when you go home at night, your one hundred strokes will result in a shining halo rather than a shining pate.

## The 1913 Paterson, New Jersey Silk Strike

by Steve Golin

Alexander Hamilton prophetically imagined Paterson, New Jersey as a manufacturing center which would draw on the water power of the Great Falls of the Passiac River. Hamilton also imagined a town controlled by its manufacturing class. From the beginning, that control was contested. One of the first strikes in the United States was a strike of Paterson cotton workers in the 1820s. By the time the silk industry took shape in the abandoned cotton mills, during the 1860s and 1870s, skilled immigrant weavers were fighting the mill owners for control of work in the mills and of the town itself. By 1913, Paterson was "Silk City," essentially a one-industry town. But it was not a company town.

Immigrant weavers came to Paterson in the 1860s and 1870s from Macclesfield, England and other European silk centers. They took pride in their skill and expected to be treated with respect. Because they knew they could not be easily replaced, they frequently went on strike to enforce their demands. From the 1890s, the manufacturers preferred to hire Jewish weavers from Lodz and Bialystok (in Poland), or Italian weavers from Biella (in Piedmont). The manufacturers hoped that the new immigrants would be less militant and easier to control than the English, French and German workers who preceded them. Their hopes were bitterly disappointed. The silk manufacturers in Paterson continued to experience frequent strikes, culminating in 1913 in the biggest and longest strike of all.

Silk strikers in 1913 hoped to pass their skill and way of life on to their children and fought to preserve their way of life. Conditions in the mills were relatively healthy because silk textile manufacturers kept their mills clean and light to protect their investment in raw silk, which was expensive and delicate. The pay for weavers, who constituted the majority of the 25,000 silk workers in Paterson in 1913, was much more than that of unskilled laborers or department store clerks. Weaving silk took years to learn, and was usually passed down from father to son or daughter. Many weavers owned their homes, in Paterson or in the nearby working-class suburb of Haledon. Many women weavers kept working after marriage, because the job was considered a good one. A key demand in

1913 was for an eight-hour day. Previous struggles had reduced the work day to ten hours, with a half day on Saturday. Silk workers pressed their demand for a 44 hour week. Their radical slogan, written on placards, was "Eight hours work, eight hours sleep, and eight hours pleasure."

One group of silk workers was concerned with survival. Dye-house laborers, called dyers helpers, were paid roughly half what weavers were paid and faced periodical layoffs. In addition, they worked with chemicals that were bad for their health. This work was unskilled and concentrated in a few big plants. Whereas silk manufacturing was highly decentralized, with about 300 different companies typically employing 50 or 75 people each, dye houses employed 1,000 or 2,000 people. By 1913, the bulk of dyers helpers were immigrants from southern Italy. Unlike weavers from northern Italy, they came with no prior textile experience.

Dyers helpers much more closely fit the stereotype of exploited workers. However, in Paterson, living in a working-class community in which collective struggle was part of the way of life, the dyers helpers quickly became militant themselves. During strikes, they were more ready to use violence than the weavers, partly because they could more easily be replaced. But the defeat by the state militia in an extremely violent 1902 strike led them to reconsider their tactics. In 1913, dyers helpers joined weavers in embracing non-violence on the picket line.

### Industrial Workers of the World

In 1913, silk weavers and dyers asked the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) to help them organize and publicize their strike. The IWW had won a great textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts during 1912. The IWW themes of solidarity between different ethnic groups, democratic control of the strike by the strikers themselves, and non-violence on the picket line, played well in Paterson. IWW leaders with Lawrence experience, Big Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Carlo Tresca, came to Paterson and helped solidify the strike.

Ordinarily, silk strikes were short. Strikers made their point, gained some concessions, and went back

to work. To exert maximum pressure on employers, they usually struck when silk textiles were being prepared for the spring or fall seasons of the garment industry in New York. But in 1913, the manufacturers did not give in. The strike, which began in February, lasted for five months. Although nearly 25,000 workers actively joined the strike, the manufacturers refused to accept their demands and shifted some production to mills in other locals.



**Mass Rally at the Botto House, Paterson**

By the end of two months, most weavers had spent their savings. Picketing had been declared a crime and the police closed their meeting halls. The press in Paterson and New York were also against them. Desperate for allies, the silk strikers reached out to the people of New York. Young New York poets and artists drawn by the romantic image of the IWW had already begun making the pilgrimage to Paterson. The strikers and the IWW attempted to use these writers and artists as a bridge to working people and middle-class Socialists in New York. The most audacious idea to emerge from the collaboration of silk workers, IWW leaders, and the writers and artists was the idea of the Paterson Pageant.

On a Saturday night in June, an overflow crowd filled Madison Square Garden to see the Pageant. The backdrop to the giant stage was a block-long painting of a mill by John Sloan. On stage, directed by John Reed, 1,100 strikers acted out the key events of their strike. Robert Edmund Jones contributed the ultra-modern idea of the strikers running down the

aisle through the audience at the conclusion of the first scene yelling "Strike! Strike!" The audience responded to the energy of the worker-actors and began to participate in the performance. Reviews, even in conservative papers, acknowledged the extraordinary energy, discipline and power of the Pageant.

In the end, the strikers ran out of money and hope. In July, their solidarity gave way, and workers began to go back to work. Six years later, silk workers finally won the eight-hour day in another strike. Economic conditions in Paterson deteriorated during the 1920, and the silk industry collapsed in the 1930s due to the depression and the competition from the new synthetics (rayon and nylon.)

It is important to teach about the Paterson strike of 1913 so that the courage, creativity and intelligence of the silk workers will not be forgotten. Their history also challenges our assumptions about the capacities of people who work with their hands. The silk strikers overcame divisions of ethnicity, skill, and gender, and forged a solidarity that lasted for months. Learning from experience, they embraced non-violence as a tactic. They democratically defined their strike demands and shaped their strike strategy. They participated in avant garde theatre to publicize their struggle and discussed modern ideas like birth control at meetings organized for women.

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**Sample Plans Prepared by the American Labor Museum/Botto House National Landmark**

Materials for these lessons are available by contacting American Labor Museum/Botto House National Landmark, 83 Norwood St., Haledon, NJ 07508. (973) 595-7953

**Lesson 1: Smokestacks and Steeples: A Portrait of Paterson**

Objective: Enable students to understand the ways in which Paterson, New Jersey has changed and continues to change.

Materials: VCR/TV, "Smokestacks and Steeples: A Portrait of Paterson" (Vincent N. Parrillo, 1992) (video)

Procedures:

1. Introduce the video by asking students to think about the title, "Smokestacks and Steeples: A Portrait of Paterson," and to interpret its meaning after viewing the tape. (Note for teacher: After viewing the video, students should comprehend that "smokestacks" represent the factories, Paterson's economic strength, and "steeples" represent the churches, Paterson's spiritual strength.)
2. Present video - 28 minutes.
3. Discuss - Industries of Paterson (cotton, paper, guns, locomotives, steam snow plows, silk, and airplane engines).
4. Contrast People of Paterson (laborers, immigrants, and minorities compared to the elite business owners) with a focus on mill workers and the mills

**Lesson 2: House on the Green**

Objective: To reinforce previous lesson and prepare students for Labor Education On-Site or Virtual Field Trip: The Botto House, An Immigrant's Home in 1908..

Materials: VCR/TV, "House on the Green" (American Labor Museum/Botto House National Landmark, 1985) (video), excerpts from "Report on Conditions of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States," Vol. IV, The Silk Industry (Washington, DC, 1911).

Procedures:

1. Have students recall previous lesson's video and its coverage of the 1913 Silk Strike.
2. Introduce the video by telling students that they're about to visit the home of a silk mill worker.
3. As students to pay close attention to the workers' problems and the ways in which they dealt with them as presented on the video.
4. Present video.
5. Follow-up with their reactions.
6. Distribute or discuss excerpts on working conditions:

**Two abbreviated examples:**

"In May, 1907, the winders demanded an increase in wages from \$6 to \$7 per week. This demand was granted upon the condition that the winders tend 85 spindles instead of 72. The winders though kept busier than formerly, nevertheless still have opportunities of sitting down during the day. It is Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s opinion that spinning is much too hard and trying work for women. There is so much bending and stooping to be done, in tending the spools on the lower decks of a spinning machine, the lower decks on either side being only 5 or 6 inches from the floor."

"In this establishment, a large one, women and children are exclusively employed in all departments except twisting-in. This was the direct result of a long and bitter fight with the union employees."

**Homework:** Prepare students for trip by having students go home and ask family members and/or friends if they are union members. List the names of the unions to which interviewee(s) belong. Discuss the interviewees views on unions. Check newspapers for stories regarding labor/management relations and be prepared to discuss.

## Activist Women and Radical Labor Struggles in New Jersey

by Peter Dunn, Neil McCabe and Alan Singer

**Mary Harris** was born in the city of Cork in Ireland in July, 1837. She emigrated to North America as a young girl with her father, Richard Harris, a railway laborer, possibly during the Great Irish Famine. Many details about her life come from her autobiography, *The Autobiography of Mother Jones* (1925/1980, Chicago, IL: Kerr Publishing). In 1861, Mary Harris married George Jones, an iron moulder and labor union member in Memphis, Tennessee. Following the death of her husband and their four children in a yellow fever epidemic in 1867, she relocated to Chicago, Illinois where she became involved with an early industrial union, the Knights of Labor. In the 1890s, she became known as “**Mother**” **Jones** and began a long association with socialist causes and the United Mine Workers of America. She attended the founding convention of Social Democracy of America in 1897, and in the same year, organized support and publicity for striking bituminous coal miners in West Virginia, including a children’s march and parades of farmers delivering food to the miners’ camp.

Her notable activities included organizing women in support of a 1899 anthracite coal strike in eastern Pennsylvania, directing strikes of young women working in textile mills, campaigning for the release of Mexican revolutionaries imprisoned in American jails, and testifying in 1915 in Congressional hearings against the abuse of corporate power by Rockefeller interests. In 1903, she helped organize a Children’s Crusade against child labor that included a ninety mile march from Philadelphia to New York City. In 1905 she participated in the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World, a radical labor union committed to the organization of unskilled workers. “Mother” Jones remained active in the labor movement and radical causes into her nineties. She died on November 30, 1930 and was buried in the coal miners’ cemetery in Mt. Olive, Illinois.

The march of the mill children grew out of a 1903 strike in Kensington, Pennsylvania, where 75,000 textile workers were on strike. An estimated 10,000 of the strikers were children. To win public support for the strikers, “Mother” Jones led an army of children across New Jersey from Philadelphia to New York City. The description of the march that follows is taken from her autobiography (74-83).

**Elizabeth Gurley Flynn** was born in New Hampshire in 1890. Her family moved to New York City in 1900 where she was expelled from high school because of political activism. Flynn’s career as a radical began in 1906 when she was 16 and joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). She became a full-time organizer for the IWW, a founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union, active in the campaign against the conviction and execution of Sacco-Vanzetti, and a leader in struggles for women’s rights, suffrage and birth control. In 1936, Flynn joined the Communist Party and remained active until her death in 1964. Flynn was immortalized by Wobbly songwriter Joe Hill as “The Rebel Girl” in a popular labor song. It later became the title of her autobiography (New York: International Press, 1955). This account of the 1913 Paterson silk strike appears in her autobiography (165-166).

**Ella Reeve** was born on Staten Island in New York in 1862 and raised in Bridgeton, New Jersey where her father was a pharmacist and dry goods merchant. As a child, she was befriended by Walt Whitman and met the abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher. When she was nineteen, she married a cousin, Lucien Ware, and moved to Haddonfield, NJ where she gave birth to three children, two of whom died in childhood. The family also lived in Woodstown and Woodbury. During this period, Ella became active in the local woman’s suffrage and Prohibitionist movements. Starting in the 1890s she became an active socialist, labor organizer, associate of Eugene Debs, and regular contributor to socialist newspapers. She was the Socialist candidate for Lieutenant Governor of New York in 1917.

Ella, who was married three times, later became well-known among working people and by the political left as “**Mother**” **Bloor**. Following World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, she was a founding member of the Workers’ (Communist) Party and in 1921 and 1922 was a delegate to international communist conferences in the Soviet Union. In 1926, she was active in raising money to support a strike by Passaic, New Jersey mill workers. The mill workers strike committee was part of the Trade Union Education League, a militant, communist-led labor organization, that organized unskilled workers who were often ignored by other unions. Her autobiography, *We Are Many* (New York: International Publishers), was published by the

Communist Party in 1940. She died in 1951. The story about her involvement in the Passaic strike is taken from her autobiography (201-202).

### **Mother Jones and the March of the Mill Children (1903)**

All along the line of march the farmers drove out to meet us with wagon loads of fruit and vegetables. Their wives brought the children clothes and money. The interurban trainmen would stop their trains and give us free rides. Marshal Sweeny and I would go ahead to the towns and arrange sleeping quarters for the children, and secure meeting halls. As we marched on, it grew horribly hot. There was no rain and the roads were heavy with dust. From time to time we had to send some of the children back to their homes. They were too weak to stand the march.

We were on the outskirts of New Trenton, New Jersey, cooking our lunch in the wash boiler, when the conductor on the interurban car stopped and told us the police were coming down to notify us that we could not enter the town. There were mills in the town and the mill owners didn't like our coming.

I said, "All right, the police will be just in time for lunch." Sure enough, the police came and we invited them to dine with us. They looked at the little gathering of children with their tin plates and cups around the wash boiler. They just smiled and spoke kindly to the children, and said nothing at all about not going into the city. We went in, held our meeting, and it was the wives of the police who took the little children and cared for them that night, sending them back in the morning with a nice lunch rolled up in paper napkins. . . .

One night in Princeton, New Jersey, we slept in the big cool barn on [former President] Grover Cleveland's great estate. The heat became intense. There was much suffering in our ranks, for our little ones were not robust. The proprietor of the leading hotel sent for me. "Mother," he said, "order what you want and all you want for your army, and there's nothing to pay."

I called on the mayor of Princeton and asked for permission to speak opposite the campus of the University. I said I wanted to speak on higher education. The mayor gave me permission. A great crowd gathered, professors and students and the people; and I told them that the rich robbed these little children of any education of the lowest order that they might send their sons and daughters to places of higher education. That they used the hand and feet of little children that they might buy automobiles for their wives and police dogs for their daughters to talk French to. I said the mill owners take babies almost from the cradle. And I showed the professors children in our army who could scarcely read or write because they were working ten hours a day in the silk mills of Pennsylvania. . . .

From Jersey City we marched to Hoboken. I sent a committee over to the New York Chief of Police, Ebstein, asking for permission to march up Fourth Avenue to Madison Square where I wanted to hold a meeting. The chief refused and forbade our entrance to the city. . . . Well finally they decided to let the army come in. We marched up Fourth Avenue to Madison Square and police officers, captains, sergeants, roundsmen, and reserves from three precincts accompanied us. But the police would not let us hold a meeting in Madison Square. They insisted that the meeting be held in Twentieth Street.

We marched to Twentieth Street. I told an immense crowd of the horrors of child labor in the mills around the anthracite region and I showed them some of the children. I showed them Eddie Dunphy, a little fellow of twelve, whose job it was to sit all day on a high stool, handing in the right thread to another worker. Eleven hours a day he sat on the high stool with dangerous machinery all about him. All day long, winter and summer, spring and fall, for three dollars a week. And then I showed them Gussie Rangnew, a little girl from whom all the childhood had gone. Her face was like an old woman's. Gussie packed stocking in a factory, eleven hours a day for a few cents a day. We raised a lot of money for the strikers and hundreds of friends offered their homes to the little ones while we were in the city.

Our march had done its work. We had drawn the attention of the nation to the crime of child labor. And while the strike of the textile workers in Kensington was lost and the children driven back to work, not long afterward the Pennsylvania legislation passed a child labor law that sent thousands of children home from the mills, and kept thousands of others from entering the factory until they were fourteen years of age.

### **Questions**

1. Trace the line of march on a map of New Jersey.
2. What happened when the marchers reached New York City?
3. In your opinion, why did so many ordinary people help the "March of the Mill Children"?

**Work and Workers**

4. Do you think Mother Jones and the strike organizers did the right thing when they involved the children in this way? Explain.

## Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Remembers the Paterson Strike (1913)

The life of a strike depends upon constant activities. In Paterson, as in all IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] strikes, there were mass picketing, daily mass meetings, children's meetings, the sending of many children to New York and New Jersey cities, and the unique Sunday gatherings. These were held in the afternoon in the little town of Haledon, just over the city line from Paterson. The mayor was a Socialist who welcomed us. A striker's family [Maria Botto] lived there in a two-story house. There was a balcony on the second floor, facing the street, opposite a large green field. It was a natural platform and amphitheatre. Sunday after Sunday, as the days became pleasanter, we spoke there to enormous crowds of thousands of people – the strikers and their families, workers from other Paterson industries, people from nearby New Jersey cities, delegations from New York of trade unionists, students and others. . . .

A touching episode occurred in one of our children's meetings. I was speaking in simple language about the conditions of silk workers – why their parents had to strike. I spoke of how little they were paid for weaving the beautiful silk. . . . I asked: "Do you wear silk?" They answered in a lively chorus. "No!" I asked: Does your mother wear silk?" Again there was a loud "No!" But a child's voice interrupted, making a statement. This is what he said: "My mother has a silk dress. My father spoiled the cloth and had to bring it home." The silk worker had to pay for the piece he spoiled and only then did his wife get a silk dress!

We had a woman's meeting, too, in Paterson at which [Bill] Haywood, [Carlo] Tresca and I spoke. When I told this story to the women clad in shoddy cotton dresses, there were murmurs of approval which confirmed that the child was right – all the silk they ever saw outside the mill was spoiled goods. Tresca made some remarks about shorter hours, people being less tired, more time to spend together and jokingly he said: "More babies." The women did not look amused. When Haywood interrupted and said: "No Carlo, we believe in birth control – a few babies, well cared for!", they burst into laughter and applause.

### Questions

1. What types of activities take place during an IWW strike?
2. Why did the IWW organize meetings for children and women? Do you agree with this strategy? Explain.

## Mother Bloor and the Passaic, New Jersey Mill Strike (1926)

In January, 1926, the U.F.C. [union] members had been discharged by the Botany Mills for presenting demands for rescinding a five per cent wage cut, time-and-half for overtime and no discrimination against union workers. The other workers in that mill struck, and the strike spread to other mills. The workers carried on the strike with great heroism and unity against the bosses' efforts to break it through the courts, the police, and all kinds of terrorism.

This was the first mass strike under Communist leadership. Alfred Wagenknecht organized an extensive relief set-up. While the A.F. of leadership was hostile, a number of their locals cooperated very well. Bakers' Union men took turns each week making bread for the strikers. Every morning early, their trucks could be seen going over the ferry from New York to Passaic, filled with bread for the strikers.

A big national relief campaign was started and I was assigned the task of raising funds. Since most of the weavers were women one of our jobs was to organize groups of women sympathizers. I cooperated with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and other women organizers in organizing the care of the 1,000 or so strikers' children who had to be provided with sandwiches and milk everyday. . . .

When after six months the bosses were unable to break the strike, they tried the maneuver of offering to deal with the strikers if they would get rid of the Communist leadership and join the U.T.W. The workers decided to call the bosses' bluff, since they did not wish to block a settlement. Strike leaders who were Party members were withdrawn and the workers affiliated with the U.T.W. The employers then refused to deal with the U.T.W., and the strike continued under Party leadership, as the U.T.W. did nothing.

In December, after eleven months of struggle, the Botany Mills accepted the union demands, restored the wage cut, agreed not to discriminate against the union members and to recognize the grievance committee, and other mills soon followed.

### Questions

1. Why were workers at the Botany Mills "discharged"?
2. What was the role of "Communist leadership" in this strike?
3. In your opinion, did the workers at Botany Mills make the right decision when they turned to Communists for leadership and support? Explain.

## The Battle of Passaic: Multiple Perspectives on Labor Struggles

1. Examine the first two accounts of the 1926 Passaic, NJ mill workers strike. Document 1. “The Battle of Passaic” is from *New Masses*, which was aligned with the radical groups that were supporting the strike. Document 2. “Passaic Strikers Routed by Fire Hose as Gas Bombs Fail” is from *The New York Times*.
2. List and compare similarities and differences portrayed in documents 1 and 2. Discuss how historians can decide which report to believe. Explain your ideas.
3. Examine Documents 3 and 4, an editorial and a news article from subsequent editions of *The New York Times*. How do these documents influence the way you viewed the earlier accounts? Explain your reasons.

**Document 1.** The Battle of Passaic  
by Mary Heaton Vorse, *New Masses*, May, 1926

The Chief of Police, Richard Zober, threw tear gas bombs at peaceable workers who were picketing the Botany Mills and turned the streams of five hose companies on them. . . .

From the first, the strike in Passaic burned with a clear flame. The fuel it fed on was leadership and hope. It had a leadership that had vision, and wisdom and daring. The organizer, Albert Weisbord, has a way of dealing with masses of workers that amounted to a genius of leadership. The workers in Passaic love him and trust him. They follow him. There was never a strike so well disciplined. That was why mass picketing was its feature and parades its habit. That was why picketing could go on at such a big scale. That was why thousands of people could stream down Passaic streets without disorder.

It was their orderly mass picketing and parading that swung the strike into public notice. No strike of this size ever had such parades. No strike of this size had ever had such picket lines. They sweep out the three strike halls two by two. They stream down the streets gathering volume as they go until there are thousands of people in the parade. As they go they sing and shout. Flags go with them. Women and children, young girls, old ladies, grandmothers, all shouting and singing together. Who will ever forget them who has seen them out on the picket line early in the morning in dark groups that look like swarming bees? The lines of pickets, the constant file of people was an exciting thing. It became contagious. Picketing became Passaic’s favorite game. Children played at picketing. They picketed their schools. They picketed their homes. Children came out after school to go on the picket line.

**Document 2.** Passaic Strikers Routed by Fire Hose as Gas Bombs Fail, *The New York Times*, March 3, 1926

Tear bombs, a dozen mounted patrolmen and sixty-five foot policemen were unable to disperse a crowd of 2,000 hooting, jeering textile strikers near the Botany Worsted Mills late this afternoon. As a last resort five fire companies were summoned and the crowd was broken up with six streams of water playing from powerful nozzles in the hands of firemen and patrolmen.

As the strikers fled in all directions they were followed by patrolmen with brandished clubs, who beat those who attempted to realign small ranks of picketers. . . . Chief of Police Richard L. Zober blamed Albert Weisbord, head of the United Front Committee, conducting the strike, for the scene at the Botany Mills. Which was the first outbreak of violence since the strike began nearly six weeks ago. . . . Weisbord did not take part in the demonstration, and for this Chief Zober attacked him as a “coward.” The strike leader in a statement denounced the “Cossack outrages” of the police, and said the union’s answer would be to have the picket line tomorrow composed of women and children, with babies in perambulators (carriages). . . .

Department of Justice agents are in Passaic attending strike meetings and it is rumored they may take action against some of the strike leaders soon. They are investigating the Communist Party’s alleged relation to the movement. . . .

Colonel Johnson of the Botany Mill declared yesterday that under no condition would the owners “compromise by entering into conference with a Communist organization. We have always been and are now ready to talk over conditions with our own people,” he said. . . . Colonel Johnson said that the mill could not afford a wage increase.

**Document 3.** Editorial, "Topics Of The Times: Why Do They Hate Publicity?" March 5, 1926, 20:5.

One wants to believe that the police of Passaic and Clifton have been performing, in dealing with the textile strikers, their high duty to maintain order and protect property. It is an often demonstrated tendency of strikers in that industry and State to justify and to require police restraints. They are not a gentle folk, those workers in New Jersey, and when excited by real or fancied wrongs - they have had both - they have been known to misbehave in serious ways

Yet the natural inclination to assume that in handling these strikers the police have been right is weakened by the news that the men in uniform showed a special animosity against the press photographers who wanted to take pictures of what was going on.

Now why was that? If the police were doing only what they should do, suppressing rioters, one would expect them to be glad to have such pictures taken and published later in the papers. So would their courage and skill be made widely known. By opposing the taking of these pictures, by attacking the photographers and breaking their cameras, the policemen went far toward giving more than excuse for the suspicion that their acts would not bear publicity - that they did not want permanent and indubitable testimony as to just who did this or that to the men, women and children in the crowd of strikers.

**Document 4.** "Passaic Police Chief is Ordered Arrested for Strike Clubbing," March 6, 1926, 1:1.

Warrants for the arrest of Chief of Police Richard O. Zober and two patrolmen, Cornellius Struck and Edward J. Hogan, were issued tonight by Justice of the Peace Julius Katz, of 16 Lexington Avenue. Five complainants swore that Zober and his men struck them with clubs in recent clashes between police and textile strikers.

Constable John M. Miller, of 65 Dayton Avenue was asked by Katz to serve the warrants on the two policemen. He refused saying he knew the men and would not "be a rat." He denounced a group of New York newspapermen and photographers blaming them for the recent riots in this vicinity. Other constables also refused to serve the warrants, pleading friendship for the policemen.

Justice Katz jumped into an automobile and hurried to Paterson, four miles away and returned here with Constable Arthur Barrow, of 48 Providence Avenue, West Paterson. It was on his return with Barrow that Katz issued the warrant for Zober. The three warrants were turned over to Barrow for immediate execution.

### **National History Club**

**730 Boston Post Road, Suite 24 Sudbury, MA 01776 USA**

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Club was founded in March of 2002 to serve as a clearinghouse for information about the activities of its member chapters around the country, sharing ideas and experiences that further promote the study of history. Schools in twenty-four states now have chapters, and there are over 1,300 students involved. There is no fee for a secondary school History Club chapter to be granted a charter by the National History Club. The NHC wants any individual with a genuine interest in history to be part of our organization. We expect our Club to be able to connect students of diverse backgrounds and varying abilities from schools across the country. History Clubs which join the NHC may be of several different kinds. Some may already be established, while others may be newly formed. Certain Clubs will emphasize local history and site visits. Some will want to put their time into History Day or History Fair projects of various kinds. Others may focus on reading history books together and writing long serious history papers. As with any national organization of this kind, it will take a while to build, but as the number of chapters grow it will be possible to think about ways in which member chapters can meet, perhaps conduct colloquia and competitions, and otherwise build on the historical interests of their members. We provide members with a newsletter twice a year (available at [www.tcr.org](http://www.tcr.org)), sharing information about club activities in member chapters around the country. There is a 25% discount on individual subscriptions to *The Concord Review* for club members. We ask that secondary schools applying for a charter send a letter to Robert Nasson, Executive Director, with the names and addresses of all the members and the advisor, requesting to become a chapter of the National History Club.

## American Labor Museum/Botto House National Landmark

83 Norwood Street, Haledon, NJ 07508 Phone: (973)595-7953 Fax: (973)595-7291  
<http://community.nj.com/cc/labormuseum> Email: [labormuseum@aol.com](mailto:labormuseum@aol.com)

The Botto House, a national landmark, stands amid New Jersey suburbia in the town of Haledon. The home was built in 1908 and restored in 1982-83. It was the home of immigrant silk mill workers Maria and Pietro Botto. The moment you cross the threshold of this historic home, you are flooded with a sense of stepping back in time.

Each room is filled with the memorabilia of the family's past. The kitchen, cozy and inviting, still has the beer pail the children used to bring back ale from the local pub. The dining room is set for formal dinners. Maria Botto provided home cooked meals to mill workers for a small fee. Upstairs, two apartments were rented out to other families, providing the Botto's with another source of income. The Botto's also had a beautiful arbor where grapes were grown to make homemade wine.

The Botto home was a safe-haven for local mill workers seeking solidarity and social change. Its American Labor Museum tells the story of how immigrants from around the world came together in a struggle for better working conditions and lives. Their efforts produced reforms that continue to benefit the workers today.

The museum offers a multitude of teaching opportunities for middle school and high school. Programs include "Museum in a Suitcase" with seven different portable exhibits. There are curriculum guides on "An Immigrant's Home," "The Textile Industry in America," "Organized Workers," "Workers Struggles Which Led to Strikes," and "The Fight for Civil Rights and Child Labor." Class tours are available for Great Falls and the Paterson Museum.

Distance Learning Classes are available to schools that have the technology. The museum has eight Virtual Field Trip presentations (Grades 4 - 12) available for school with an ISDN connection They include "American Textile Industry, 1900 - Present," "Botto House: An Immigrant's Home in 1908," "Women at Work: Paterson Silk Strike of 1913," "Child Labor: 1900 - Present," "Paul Robeson (1898 - 1976): American Hero," "A. Philip Randolph, the Pullman Porters & the Civil Rights Movement," "Workers' Struggles which led to Strikes, 1900 - Present," and "Solidarity Forever: Organized Workers, 1900 - Present." The Virtual Field Trip presentations provide students with the opportunity to learn more about the history and contemporary issues of working people and immigrants and, they serve as a source of inspiration for students to become active members of their community, country, and world. The presentations are designed for a 45-minute class period, but the length of each program may be tailored to meet the various needs of participants. The museum's Virtual Field Trips are interactive. Students are assigned the role of historians. Then, they are presented with a series of primary materials including photographs, artifacts, audio recordings, graphs, and charts that are analyzed by the class. There is free time at the end of the Virtual Field Trip for a question and answer session. Suggested classroom activities for each Virtual Field Trip are available from the museum.

Office hours are 9AM-5PM, Monday through Friday. Visiting hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 1-4 PM, other times, by appointment. There is a suggested donation of \$1.50. Annual membership dues range from \$7.50 to \$50. - Jayne O'Neill

## American Labor Studies Center

The American Labor Studies Center is located at the Kate Mullany House in Troy, New York. The mission of the ALSC is to collect and disseminate labor history and labor studies curricula to K-12 teachers so that schoolchildren can become familiar with the lives and work of labor leaders. Kate Mullany was an Irish immigrant who led the first all-women union in the United States. She formed the Collar Laundry Union when she was 19. As president of the union she organized a successful strike in 1864 that increased union wages by 25 percent. Mullany went on to become the first woman to hold office in a national union all while raising four children and caring for her widowed mother. Visit the ALSC website at <http://www.labor-studies.org>. (Source: American Teacher, September 2003, p. 2)

# Portraying Work and Workers in the Movies

by Norman Markowitz

For the most part, the trade union movement and working people have been severely under-represented and routinely stereotyped in Hollywood movies, television programs, and the general news media. When workers and trade unionists do appear, it is usually as characters in situation comedies and crime melodramas. In programs that show people working as emergency room operators, forensic criminologists, and professional employees, their unions are either non-existent or function as a source of trouble for the good guys of the series. While business leaders are called “industrialists,” “CEOs,” “executives,” or “managers,” trade union leaders are identified as “labor bosses,” sometimes as “union bureaucrats,” and at best as “union officials.” For teachers, these stereotypes make it difficult to introduce trade union and working class history and experience to students. Fortunately, a few powerful documentaries and movies do provide opportunities for teachers to open new horizons for their students.

*1877: The Grand Army of Starvation* is a half hour documentary produced by the Social History Project at CUNY. Narrated by James Earl Jones, it recounts the history of the national railroad strike in cartoons, illustrations, photographs, and dramatized scenes. The militancy of workers, the commitment of industrialists to force wage cutbacks, and the explosive violence used by private and government forces against workers dominates the short documentary. Students learn how whole cities were taken over briefly by workers. They will be able to understand why the Hayes administration used troops withdrawn from the South as part of the abandonment of Reconstruction to break the strikes. The documentary also shows that workers, like Blacks, were portrayed in popular illustrations as subhuman, ape-like creatures and that the strikes were blamed on “Communist” agitators.

*The Wobblies*, a 90 minute film on the history of the Industrial Workers of the World, deals with the creation of the IWW by socialists and other radicals in 1905. The film presents its “One Big Union” ideology, strikes, free speech campaigns, and ruthless repression during World War I by the Wilson administration, business groups, and nationalist vigilantes. Interviews with old Wobbly activists and silent screen cartoons from WWI portraying the IWW as rats linked to the Russian Bolsheviks

provide students with some insight into class-conscious trade unionism, the richness and diversity of United States working class culture, and the role of business and government in fighting labor militancy through both legal and illegal means. Roger Baldwin, an old IWW member and longtime executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, provides a straightforward and accessible narration that complements the documentary’s brilliant use of IWW songs, posters, film footage, and interviews. Students learn how war and the “super-patriotism” promoted by governments and media to win public support for war injure workers, minorities and critics of government war policies.

*Miles of Smiles* deals sympathetically with A. Philip Randolph, his leadership in establishing the Sleeping Car Porters Union, and his struggles in the American Federation of Labor and the labor movement against racism and segregation. It is a fascinating documentary that shows the connections between the labor and Civil Rights movement. It includes Randolph’s call for a march on Washington in 1941 that led to Roosevelt’s executive order to integrate defense plants. The documentary provides students and teaches with vivid examples of the role of mass protest in influencing the course of history.

## Women Workers

*Union Maids* is an hour long documentary about three women who are grassroots union activists in Chicago. It eloquently portrays the conditions that existed in factories and meatpacking houses in the 1930s, the great risks involved when organizing unions, and the egalitarian and socialist ideals which inspired the activists. The film uses newsreel footage and interviews to show the role that racism and male chauvinism played among workers and documents successful campaigns by activists to form inclusive unions. It also touches on the postwar McCarthyite purges in the unions that struck directly at its three protagonists and deeply compromised the labor movement. Women workers are also the subject of what is perhaps the best World War II documentary, *Rosie the Riveter*. The problems faced by the millions of women who went to work during the war are demonstrated through a mix of wartime propaganda newsreels and interviews with women workers. For secondary school, these labor documentaries, all of which are intrinsically

interesting and entertaining, introduce students to the history of American labor and the function of trade unions in society. The also can help students better understand the role of immigrants, women and minorities in the development of the working class in the United States.

### Hollywood Looks at Labor

Many of the most famous Hollywood movies portraying unions, *On the Waterfront*, *Joe*, *Blue Collar* and *Hoffa*, have been crime dramas. Hollywood teaches Americans and the world that American workers have little sense and less dignity, and are excluded from the world of the professional and managerial “middle classes” because of their social inferiority. However there are important exceptions. For teachers of world history, a 1960 Italian film, *The Organizer* is particularly useful (there are dubbed and subtitled versions). It stars the Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni as an Ichabod Crane-like socialist professor who advises striking factory workers. The film shows socialist teachers in the late nineteenth century establishing basic literacy courses for workers and an underground socialist party aiding them in a strike. While the workers are rough and funny and not without prejudices against each other (Sicilians for example are called “Africans”), they also are capable of solidarity and collective decency. The film explains the role that socialists played in the development of the European trade union movement and the identification of socialism with democracy and workers rights that characterized the labor movement in Western Europe and Great Britain in the decades before World War I.

*Matawan* (1987), a film about West Virginia coal miners in the post-WWI period, is the only American historical film comparable to *The Organizer*. In *Matawan* the organizer and the workers finds themselves in a culture of sudden violence, where employers literally act out Jay Gould’s famous statement, “I can hire half of the working class to kill the other half.” These workers are treated as animals to be herded and held in check, wage slaves similar to the chattel slaves of the antebellum period, except killing them is no loss of a capital investment. While the coal miners portrayed in *Matawan* were among the most militant and the most oppressed workers in the world (the great dangers in their work compelled them to develop a high level of work solidarity), the brutality of the owners and their agents still stands out. Although *The Organizer* ended in the strike’s defeat and its

socialist leader’s imprisonment, the film offered hope for the future. When the workers are defeated in *Matawan*, there is little left them other than their courage and dignity.

Hope and the possibility of progress do arise in John Ford’s film version of John Steinbeck’s novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1941). The film, unlike the novel, has an upbeat Hollywood ending. However, it faithfully chronicles the workings of a capitalist system that forces the Joad family and a huge number of other sharecroppers and tenant farmers and off their land during the Great Depression. The dustbowl is the result, not the cause, of a system in which landowners and bankers maintain prices and profits while destroying the people who produce wealth.

Once they become migrants fleeing to California, the Joads literally become part of a great army of cheap, unprotected labor, to be employed at the lowest wage possible. The three camps that the Joads visit after they reach California are symbolic of the three worlds of struggle in the 1930s. The first camp, an anarchistic shantytown patrolled by sinister labor contractors and police, is a free market hovel where the authorities act to protect “the market” with their guns and billy clubs. In the second camp, a large ranch maintained by a private paramilitary force, there is order, low wages, and a brutal labor discipline, in effect the “new order” of Fascism. The third camp is an idealized portrayal of the New Deal Farm Security Administration camps for migrants. While the Joads are treated with decency and dignity in the government camp, and allowed to elect their own supervisory officers, it is clear that the camp cannot offer them jobs, just as the New Deal could not end the depression.

While the government camp gives them a decent place to stay and some labor law protection, it is also clear that the rich farmers and their redneck toadies are out to destroy it, just as the opponents of the New Deal were out to bust the unions and repeal the administration’s social welfare legislation. Although nothing has been resolved when the film ends, there is a sense that change is possible. Tom Joad decides to search for something more than survival and Ma Joad reminds us that the future belongs to “the people” who keep on struggling, whatever the rich and powerful do to them. While *The Grapes of Wrath* was a huge artistic and commercial success, other films like it were not made in America for decades. This was partly because of a post-war anti-labor reaction and partly as a result of anti-communism

and the blacklisting of progressive actors, directors and writers during the Cold War.

**The Anti-Communist 1950s**

In the 1950s, Hollywood’s most important portrayal of organized labor was *On The Waterfront* (1954), a labor racketeering film whose hero, Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), was a punch drunk fighter and brother of a corrupt union lawyer. While the film was hailed for its artistic power, some critics saw it as a defense of informing. Its director, Elia Kazan and screenwriter, Budd Schulberg, were former Communists who had become passionate anti-Communists. Unions and labor relations also provided the context for a big budget musical comedy, *The Pajama Game*, and a number of conservative B-movies, including *The Whistle at Eden Falls*, and *Steeltown*, in which pro-management workers are portrayed positively and workers critical of management are considered troublemakers.

There was one important exception to this trend, the independent film, *Salt of the Earth* (1954). It was made by an alliance of blacklisted Hollywood producers, directors and actors, and members of the Communist-led Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union. Highlighting real events in a New Mexico miners’ strike, *Salt of the Earth* used both professional actors and miners in the film. Unlike any Hollywood film before, or for decades after, *Salt of the Earth* dealt with gender and family relations in a labor context, portraying the tensions over housework and the political conflict between male strikers and their wives. Finally, the film deals

with the tensions between Anglo and Mexican American Workers. Although *Salt of the Earth* won awards in international film festivals, it faced extensive harassment from local and national authorities and was shown only in three movie theaters in the United States. For students, it raises questions about class, gender and ethnicity in ways that are more positive and thought-provoking than any Hollywood film.

Labor themes continued to be absent from Hollywood films in the 1960s, even though the decade’s mass protest movements helped to inspire anti-racist films, anti-cold war films, and films celebrating the emerging feminist movement and youth culture. *Norma Rae* (1979) became one of the few “mainstream “ films to portray a union organizing struggle positively. Centered on a white Southern women and her relationship with a Northern male union organizer, the film explores questions of class consciousness, race and gender relations, and the power of to stop the production process on the plant floor.

*The Organizer, Matawan, The Grapes of Wrath, Norma Rae, and Salt of the Earth* provide teachers with fictional films that confront the stereotypes that have hidden and distorted the experience and history of working people and the labor movement. They provide points of departure for assignments on European labor history, American miners’ struggles, the Great Depression, women’s labor history, and the role of race and ethnicity in labor relations. Students will enjoy them, understand them and with the help of their teachers, learn from them.

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## Using Children's Literature to Teach about Work and Workers

by Judith Y. Singer

Over the past two centuries, hundreds of thousands of people have come to the United States seeking a better life for themselves and their families. They left behind poverty and persecution and came looking for work to sustain their families. During this time period, America evolved from an agricultural society to an industrial one. Workers built bridges, railroads and skyscrapers. They dug tunnels and the canals and labored in textile factories and mines. During the Industrial Revolution, roughly 1820 to 1930, their work built America.

Unfortunately, these achievements have often been at the expense of countless workers who lost health, youth and life to help build this country. Walt Whitman gave dignity to work when he sang the praises of American workers. However, he did not report their struggles. People had a common need to work, but they also have a common need to be treated decently. They have had to struggle for the eight-hour day, for adequate pay to support their families, safe working conditions and an end to child labor. As industrialization removed work and workers from their homes and farms, it threw people together, making it possible for them to discuss their common frustrations and organize to achieve better working conditions.

The books and magazines described in this article will help children visualize the work of the industrial revolution. The stories they tell provide examples of how working people have struggled to establish their dignity and their right to decent working conditions. The first two publications, both magazines published by Cobblestones, provide a non-fiction introduction to the industrial revolution for elementary school

children. With the exception of Walt Whitman's poem, the children's literature which follows is presented in chronological order, to help illustrate the historical concept of change over time. Two final sections to this article include children's literature about working people and union struggles today, and picture books about work for younger children.

**"I came to America because I heard the streets were paved with gold. When I got here I found out three things. First, the streets weren't paved in gold. Second, they weren't paved at all, and third, I was expected to pave them."**  
- a quote from an Italian immigrant

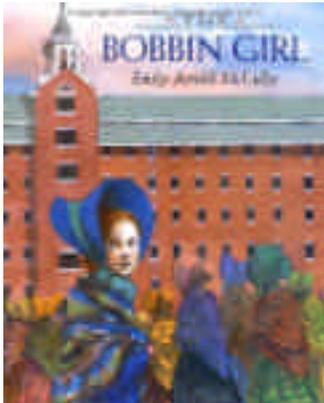
Organizing children's literature chronologically is consistent with the NCSS thematic strand *Time, Continuity, and Change* (ways that human groups locate themselves historically). Other NCSS thematic strands illustrated in these books and magazines about the Industrial Revolution include *Production, Distribution, and Consumption* (ways that individuals and societies make decisions about the things people need to survive and how they will be provided) and *Science, Technology, and Society* (methods and tools used by people to produce and distribute what they need and want within an economic system).

"The Land of Promise" by Sheri Asta (2002). *Appleseeds: Cobblestone Publications*. January 2002, Vol. 4, No. 5, pp. 20-21. The author of this article describes the hardships workers endured to build the Erie Canal. They found themselves working for 12-14 hours a day, plagued by mosquitoes, sunken chest-high in mud, and in many cases, dying from malaria or typhoid fever. Nonetheless, the author affirms, "The immigrants, American engineers, and all the other folks were proud of their accomplishment." The other articles in this issue of *Appleseeds*, subtitled "Growing Up on the Erie Canal," help children imagine what people's lives were like in New York State in 1825 when the Erie Canal was completed.

"Don't Agonize - Organize!" by Pam Gingold (1992). *Cobblestone: the history magazine for young people*. October, 1992, Vol. 13, No. 8, pp 30-31. This article, included in "The History of Labor" volume of *Cobblestones*, highlights the role of Mother Jones, a crusader for justice for working people in the United States. She led a "Children's Crusade" to bring attention to the horrendous conditions of children working in the textile factories in 1903. On a one-hundred mile march across New Jersey to bring attention to this cause,

she pronounced, “I charge that Philadelphia’s mansions were built on the broken bones, the quivering hearts, and the drooping heads of these little children!”

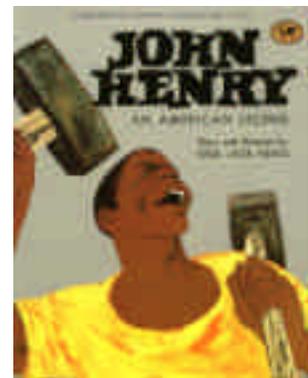
*I Hear America Singing* by Walt Whitman (1991). Illustrator, R. Sabuda (NY: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill). Written in the 1850s, this poem reflects the transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial society. The illustrations bring alive Walt Whitman’s poem. Each worker is celebrated: the carpenter, the boatman, and the shoemaker are workers of an earlier time, while the mechanic and the steamboat deckhand represent a new era of industrialization. This book provides the opportunity to talk with children about the nature of work and how it has changed over the years.



*The Bobbin Girl* by Emily McCully (1996, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers). In the 1830s, young women in the Northeast left struggling family farms to work in cotton mills like those in Lowell, Massachusetts. If they could tolerate the long hours (from 5:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m.), the dust, and the constant noise, they could find work in these mills and earn as much as \$1.75 each week to help their families. A notice of reduced wages provokes many girls to sign a petition refusing to work unless their wages are restored. Some girls worry about whether to “turn out” and stand with a friend in the courtyard, until a ten year old “bobbin doffer,” announces, “I am turning out, whether anyone does or not!” “A line of girls from Spinning Room #2 followed her all the way to the yard. She had led them all out!” Although this turn-out, or strike, was not a success, it marked the beginning of a struggle for decent working condition in the mills led by young women. That women were speaking out in public in this era was itself a victory.

The Industrial Revolution brought with it confrontations between men whose livelihoods depended on their strength and machines that could do the work of many men. There are many stories about super-strong men, particularly among those working on the railroad, laying track and driving the trains. The next books tell the stories of two of these super-human men.

*John Henry, an American Legend* by Ezra Keats (1965, NY: Dragonfly Books/Alfred A. Knopf). The legend of John Henry is in the genre of tall tales, which tell about men and women who are bigger and stronger than life. John Henry was a Black man “born with a hammer in his hand,” who was doing a man’s work while he was still a child. He bragged that he could beat any man, Black or White in any contest of strength. John Henry swore he could even beat a machine - the steam drill - which legend tells us he did at the cost of his life. He would have worked on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad between 1870 and 1873, helping to build a railroad tunnel. And “how he drove those spikes, singing to the clanging of his hammer! The men joined in, their voices singing, hammer ringing, and John Henry’s gang was in the lead as day after day the tracks moved steadily westward.”



*Casey Jones* by Allan Drummond (2001, NY: Frances Foster Books). Casey Jones was born in 1864 and died in 1900. He was the engineer on the “638,” a train which ran on track that John Henry's road crews probably helped to lay. Casey Jones represented the power of the industrial revolution, “‘cause the railroad back then was the mightiest thing, and the loco engineer was the Iron Horse King. Casey Jones! The Iron Horse King! All across America, the steel wheels rolled, joining ocean to ocean with the power of coal.” Casey Jones was never late, until one fateful night when he didn’t see the signal in time. The legend is that Casey Jones sacrificed his own life to save the lives of the people on his train that night almost one hundred years ago. The detailed illustrations in this book are particularly useful in helping readers visualize both the positive and negative changes taking place in the late nineteenth century.

*Peppe the Lamplighter* by Elisa Bartone (1993). Illustrator, T. Lewin (NY: Lathrop, Lee & Sheppard Books). “A long time ago when there was no electricity and the streetlamps in Little Italy had to be lit by hand. . . .” So begins the story of Peppe the Lamplighter, a boy of ten or twelve years of age who came to New York City in 1880 from Italy. Stories of the industrial era are often stories of how children find jobs to help support their

families. In this story, Peppe's father is ill and cannot work and his mother is dead. In *The Bobbin Girl*, Rebecca worked in the cotton mill. Peppe becomes a lamplighter. When he is offered the job, Peppe is thrilled. However, Peppe's father says, "Did I come to America for my son to light the streetlamps?" As hard as he worked, Peppe could not please his father, until the night Peppe decides not to light the streetlights and people, including his younger sister, Assunta cannot find her way home. Both Peppe and his father realize how important the work of the lamplighter really is.

*Immigrant Girl: Becky of Eldridge Street* by Brett Harvey (1987). Illustrator, D. Ray (NY: Holiday House). This story introduces the reader to immigrant life in the early part of the 20th century through the eyes of a Jewish immigrant girl named Becky Moskowitz. Becky does not look for a factory job, but she is expected to care for her younger siblings while her parents work. From her Aunt Sonia, Becky learns about sweatshops where the doors are locked so workers cannot get out during the day. In a fictional account of an actual historical event, Becky sits by Sonia's side in a big hall at Cooper Square in New York City as workers call for a strike to protest unfair working conditions. The year is 1910, one year before the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory goes up in flames, killing 146 teenaged girls.

*Fire at the Triangle Factory* by Holly Littlefield (1996). Illustrator, M. Young (Minneapolis, Mn: Carolrhoda Books). This book for young readers tells a story of how two 14-year-old girls escaped the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory on March 25, 1911. At the age of fourteen, they were considered legally old enough to work in crowded, unsafe conditions in the factory, surrounded by flammable material and sewing machine oil. On the day of the fire, when workers tried to escape, they found the first exit door locked to prevent them from leaving early. "The stairway was as hot as an oven. The girls gasped for air as they climbed." These two girls escaped by finding their way to the roof. Others were not so lucky. A reviewer of *Triangle*, a recent book for adults by David Van Drehle (2003), compares the Triangle fire to the destruction of the World Trade Center towers, noting that while the toll was smaller, the fire at the Triangle was more painful because it could have been prevented. It was self-inflicted, the result of greed and indifference.

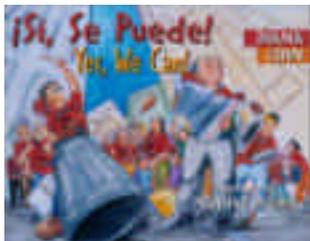
*Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold (1991, NY: Dragonfly Books). Cassie Louise Lightfoot was born in 1931, the year the George Washington Bridge opened. As she lies on her roof, her "tar beach," Cassie imagines that she owns the bridge. She tells us how her father helped to build it. Cassie explains, "But still he can't join the union because Grandpa wasn't a member. Well, Daddy is going to own that building, 'cause I'm gonna fly over it and give it to him. Then it won't matter that he's not in their old union, or whether he's colored or a half-breed Indian, like they say." Cassie's comments draw the reader into conversation about some of the racial and ethnic inequalities that marked the closing decades of the Industrial Revolution.

*No Star Nights* by Anna Smucker (1989). Illustrator, S. Johnson. (NY: Dragonfly Books). This story of a more recent era of industrialization depicts the consequences to the environment of steel mills, and the dangers the workers are subjected to as they move around the molten steel. The skies are grey from the smoke pouring out of the great chimneys. Children are confronted with hazards such as graphite blowing into their eyes and threat of being run over by a truck while they go exploring in the dump.



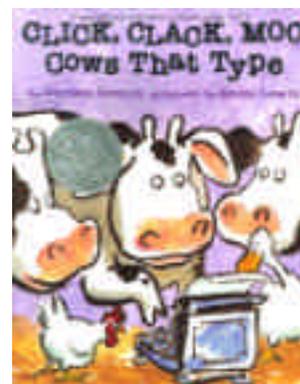
*Mama Is a Miner* by George Ella Lyon (1994). Illustrator, P. Catalanotto (NY: Orchard Books). This book introduces readers to the work of the miner as it is today. Children learn that women can be miners, although the little girl telling the story is not entirely happy that her mother is a miner. She tells us, "Just last month, Eldnon's leg got hurt. I wish Mama still worked at the store away from explosions, roof fall, dark. But ringing up grub didn't pay our bills."

*The Night Worker* by Kate Banks (2000). Illustrator, G. Hallensleben (NY: Farrar Straus Giroux). This book introduces children to night work on a construction site. The story is told by a young boy named Alex who imagines he is accompanying his father to work at night. This book allows the reader to experience the work done by big machines like cranes and cement mixers. Alex wears a hard hat and he even gets his turn driving and emptying the dump truck.



*Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can!* by Diana Cohn (2002) Illustrator, F. Delgado (Texas: Cinco Puntos Press). This story of a janitor's strike in Los Angeles in 2000 brings to the present the struggle for respect and decent pay for working people. A little boy decides to help his mother while she is on strike by making signs in his school for the strikers to carry. The signs read, "Justice for Janitors," "Justicia," "Si. Se Puede" and, "I love my Mama. She is a Janitor!" An important feature of this book is that it is written in both Spanish and English, helping children learn respect for people who speak different languages as well as respect for janitors.

Young children relate well to stories about animals behaving as if they were human beings. The following three picture books show animals hard at work. *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle (NY: Scholastic Books, 1984) tells a story about a spider steadfastly spinning its web. It can help young children learn to appreciate that work takes concentration. In Lisa Shulman's *Old MacDonald had a Woodshop* (illustrator by A. Wolff. NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002), farmyard animals are each assigned a different tool. The sheep has a saw, the cat a drill, and the goat a hammer. They wield their tools together to the tune of "Old MacDonald had a Farm." *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows that Type* by Doreen Cronin (illustrator B. Lewin. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002) is about cows going on strike for better working conditions. Farmer Brown's cows gain possession of a typewriter and they begin issuing demands: "Dear Farmer Brown, The barn is very cold at night. We'd like some electric blankets." When Farmer Brown refuses to provide the blankets, the cows post a notice on the barn door: "Sorry. We're closed. No milk today." This story is a clever way to introduce the idea of collective bargaining to younger children.



***Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson (Review by Mary Ann Savino)**

*Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson (NY: Scholastic, 1991) is a young adult historical novel set during the early industrial period of the United States. Through the story, students learn about factory life, labor rights, immigration and the struggle of women for equality. It also provides readers with an opportunity to learn about self-reliance as the heroine of the story struggles to overcome economic and social obstacles and travels an uncharted path of self-discovery and spiritual growth.

Lyddie is a thirteen-year-old New England farm girl who was forced to work in order to repay her family's debts. Along with Lyddie, upper elementary and middle school students learn about the impact of industrialization on ordinary people and the importance of collective action to secure their rights and futures. At the opening of the story a huge bear destroys the family cabin. Lyddie's mother, a widow, decides to abandon the farm, leaving Lyddie and her younger brother to fend for themselves. The farm is in debt and Lyddie is forced to sell the livestock and land. Lyddie goes to work in the kitchen of a tavern and her brother becomes an apprentice at a mill. In one of Lyddie's first adventures, she decides to help an escaped slave rather than turning him in for the reward.

When Lyddie is fired by the tavern keeper, she decides to go to Lowell, Massachusetts in search of a job in the textile mills. There she faces strange new regulations and is required to work thirteen hours a day, six days a week. The Lowell girls were treated poorly by the factory owners and eventually consider forming a union for collective action.

At first, Lyddie is able to endure the hardship of her new life because of her single-minded determination to earn money and regain the family's farm. As she continues to work in the mill and befriends the other mill girl, Lyddie's understanding of her situation changes. An injury awakens a 'new' Lyddie who is determined to join with her fellow workers to act against injustice. By the end of the novel, Lyddie travels full circle. Reborn in spirit and mind from her three years of hardship in the mills, she returns to Vermont. There she rejects a marriage proposal and decides to set off for Ohio where she will be able to get a college education.

I often have students compare Lyddie's experience with a statement by Helen Keller. Keller believed that "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experiences of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved."

## American Artists Portray Work and Workers

by Susan Zwirn

A confluence of cultural, economic, and political factors in the 1930s propelled the neglected image of the worker to the forefront of public awareness through American painting. Social Realism in art was based on the belief that politically motivated art could stimulate social reform. In the 1930s, practitioners of Social Realism portrayed the harsh realities of American life during the Depression. These artists sought common ground with the workers with whom they now identified. Images often dramatized the injustices that artists believed were the result of living in a capitalist society.

When Franklin Roosevelt assumed office in 1933, 13 million Americans were unemployed. One of the first programs of Roosevelt's New Deal was the Works Project Administration (WPA). Money was allocated for the arts for the first time in American history. At its peak, as many as 5,000 artists were part of this program. With WPA funds, regional art centers were organized with the goal of creating a truly American art, a democratic people's art. WPA artists were considered professionals and their pay averaged about \$100 per month. From 1933 until 1938, 42,406 paintings were created to adorn 13,458 buildings. Holger Cahill, the head of the W.P.A. from 1935 until 1942, was an articulate champion of this view of art. Cahill also promoted the idea of the "artist-laborer" as a visionary laborer of the people who showed workers as the noblest representatives of the American dream.

Philip Evergood, Jacob Lawrence and Ben Shahn, are renowned artists who were supported by the WPA Artists Division during the Depression. While each came from a different background, they were united in their identification with American workers. Each artist used the potency of his visual imagery to provoke viewers to share in his political, historical and social perceptions of this turbulent period. At a time when abstraction was the vogue in most artistic circles, these men chose a narrative form in painting to tell stories of men, women and work.

Philip Evergood, born in 1901, enjoyed a childhood of cultural stimulation, a fine education and European travel. He started working at the Public Works of Art Project (which later became the WPA) in 1933 and remained there until 1937. He became president of the Artists Union, formed in 1933 as a trade union to represent artists working on government projects, and was an activist in

movements supporting African American rights, the Spanish loyalist cause and Russian war relief. He was arrested in Hoboken for sketching the slums and in New York for participating in a strike protesting the layoff of WPA artists. His powerful paintings were inspired by his engagement in liberal and radical causes. Although from a privileged background, Evergood's idealism propelled him to identify with and depict the plight of suffering Americans.



*American Tragedy* was inspired by newspaper photos of a battle between picketing strikers and police at a Chicago steel mill on Memorial Day, 1937. In the painting, a striker tries to protect his pregnant wife, while around them strikers are being trampled and shot. In the background, the steel mill is painted in the same red color that represents the blood of the workers. The police are presented as a massive block of blue while the workers are separated, brutalized and in flight. There is a fallen African American in the lower right hand corner of the painting. An American flag is in his open hand. The primary color arrangement of yellow, blue and red contributes force to this powerful scene.

As an African American artist, Jacob Lawrence was a trailblazer in many important respects. At a time of pervasive and legalized segregation, Lawrence was the first African American to be represented by a major New York City art gallery. He was also the first to be exhibited in major museums and enjoy patronage outside the Black community. Lawrence's sensitivity to the issues of his time stimulated him to confront themes in the lives of African Americans. He used simplified

## Work and Workers

shapes and bright colors to present powerful social commentary on themes such as migration, work, and family. One of Lawrence's key themes was the struggle for social justice. Unlike most artists of this period, Lawrence's paintings of workers included images of female workers, especially those affected by difficult working conditions. In *Ironers* (1943), Lawrence depicts the faceless heads of women lowered in acquiescence. The repetition of the women's image three times, all in the same clothes, reinforces the idea of the repetitive nature of domestic work and the anonymity of those who practiced it. Despite the serious nature of the subject, the background is painted in brilliant colors and patterns that Lawrence noted was a feature in many Harlem homes affected by poverty.



As a young boy, Ben Shahn emigrated to the United States from Lithuania. At fourteen, he left school to become a lithographer's assistant. The financial rewards of his work enabled Shahn to attend college, art school and travel in Europe. Like Lawrence, Shahn began to explore his ethnic roots in his painting. His study of Jewish traditions reinforced

a concern for the plight of workers. Shahn became known for his political subject matter, especially his series on the trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti.



Shahn was further politicized by his experience assisting Diego Rivera, a Mexican muralist, on a Rockefeller Center mural. This mural was destroyed because of Rivera's refusal to remove the image of Lenin. Shahn worked on many WPA projects as a painter and a photographer. He created a series of murals for a subsistence homesteading community in New Jersey founded by the Farm Security Administration. In the mural reprinted here, we see reference to the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire of 1911 in the upper left. A union organizer who looks like John L. Lewis dominates the upper right. Workers in the lower right look in different directions as though seeking guidance. In the lower left we see garment workers standing before what appears to be a line of people waiting to work.

### **New York City Workers Invented Labor Day**

On Tuesday, September 5, 1882, thousands of workers participated in the first Labor Day in New York City. It was organized by the local Central Labor Union which included 56 unions with approximately 80,000 members. The idea for the Labor Day celebration is usually attributed to P. J. McGuire, the general secretary of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, a longtime activist, and a co-founder of the American Federation of Labor. The day began at 10 AM with a parade uptown from New York City Hall Park to 42nd Street and 6th Avenue (today's Bryant Park). The marchers were led along the route by a brass band. It was followed by a huge picnic, with an estimated 25,000 participants, at W. 92nd Street.

By 1886 Labor Day was a national event with marches in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Chicago and Boston. In 1887, the New York and New Jersey legislatures passed laws making it a holiday in each state. In 1994, President Grover Cleveland, formerly governor of New York, made Labor Day an official holiday for federal workers (Source: *NYT*, August 11, 2003).

**Why Unions? A Labor Song Lesson for Fifth Graders**  
by Andrea S. Libresco

Our students, as well as many of their parents, have grown up in the anti-union climate of the last twenty years. This often makes it difficult for children to understand why collective action by workers played such an important role in American history. A lesson on the conditions prompting the creation of labor unions helps students think about the decline of the effectiveness of individual effort in the face of industrialization and corporate capitalism, and the move toward collective action by workers. I find that using labor songs as primary source documents not only teaches historical content, but also engages students and introduces them to the idea that songs appeal to both literate, generally skilled workers and non-literate, generally unskilled workers. In addition, labor songs, and those who sang them, can provide models of activism for young people in their current and future working lives. The songs are particularly effective when combined with other documents, including speeches, photos, graphs, charts, artwork, political cartoons and testimony about working conditions. This lesson is organized around a documents-based question: Why Unions? Although teachers tend to use DBQs as culminating assessments, they can also be effective for presenting new information.

An exciting way to start the activity is to invite a labor organizer or a union representative to class (remember most school employees are union members) to explain the role of unions today and to conduct a simulation of a labor negotiation with you and your students. First, individual students try to negotiate with you, their teacher, individually. Then students present collective demands (e.g., condition of chairs and desks, supplies; amount and type of homework, etc.) and the teacher responds with demands of his/her own (e.g., preparedness of students, amount and type of homework, etc.). Finally, negotiators work toward settlement. Questions following the simulation may include:

4. How effective was individual negotiation compared to collective bargaining?
5. How do you account for the differences?
6. What types of issues do you think early labor unions found most important?
7. What other work-related issues do you think became important over time?

As a follow-up activity, students can research the conditions of labor in different areas of the Western Hemisphere today (including in the United States) and write and perform their own labor songs about the conditions of workers and the potential power of unions.

Other key questions to explore in a unit on labor unions include:

4. How easy was it to establish unions?
5. Do different kinds of unions in various industries have different goals and weapons?
6. What goals of workers have not yet been achieved?
7. What industries are still not unionized? Why?
8. What do we know about the lives of the people who produce the products we buy, wear, and use?

**Labor Song Books:**

Blood, P. and Patterson, A. (1992). *Rise Up Singing* (Bethlehem, Penn.: Sing Out!).

**Recordings of Union Songs:**

*American Industrial Ballads*. Pete Seeger (Folkways FH 5251).

*Carry It On*. Pete Seeger, Si Kahn and Jane Sapp (Flying Fish FF 90104).

*Doing My Job*. Si Kahn (Flying Fish FF 221)

*Songs of Work and Freedom*. Joe Glazer (Washington Records WR. 460).

*The Original "Talking Union"*. Almanac Singers and Pete Seeger (Folkways FH 5285).

**Document-based Question: Why Unions?**

**Historical Background:** In the late 1800s, the United States underwent a period of industrial growth that had an enormous impact on the lives of workers.

**Task:** Use the excerpts from the labor songs and the guiding questions to write an essay in which you:

8. *Identify* working conditions that led to the formation of organized labor unions.
9. *Discuss* how labor songs can be important in helping workers to organize unions and become more powerful.

<p><i>From “The Ballad of John Henry” (traditional)</i>                  John Henry was a little baby,                  Sitting on his mammy’s knee,                  He picked up a hammer and a little bit of steel:                  “Hammer’s gonna be the death of me,                  Hammer’s gonna be the death of me.”                  John Henry went to that tunnel to drive,                  Steam drill was by his side,                  He beat that steam drill three inches and down,                  He laid down his hammer, Lord, he died,                  Laid down a hammer, Lord, he died.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. How did John Henry do in the race with the machine?</li> <li>6. What is the message about industrialization?</li> </ol>	<p><b>From “Go To Work On Monday”</b> by Si Kahn                  I did my part in World War Two, Got wounded for the nation,                  Now my lungs are all shut down,                  There ain’t no compensation.                  The last time I went near my job,                  I thought my lungs were broken,                  Chest bound down with iron bands,                  I couldn’t breath for choking.                  The politicians in this state, They’re nothing short of rotten,                  They buy us off with fancy words,                  And sell us out to cotton.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Why is this person no longer able to work?</li> <li>7. What does he/she think of local politicians?</li> </ol>
<p><b>From “Solidarity Forever”</b> by Ralph Chaplin                  When the union’s inspiration through the worker’s blood                  shall run, There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the                  sun , Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble                  strength of one...                  But the Union makes us strong!                  They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to                  earn, But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel                  could turn. We can break their haughty power--gain our                  freedom when we learn                  That the Union makes us strong!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Who is “they” in “They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn”? What does “without our brain and muscle not a single wheel could turn” mean?</li> </ol>	<p><b>From “Drill, Ye Tarriers Drill”</b> by Thomas Casey                  Ev’ry morning at seven o’clock                  There were twenty tarriers a working at the rock,                  And the boss comes along, and he says, keep still,                  And come down heavy on the cast-iron drill.                  Our new foreman was Jim McCann.                  By God, he was a blame mean man.                  Last week a premature blast went off.                  And a mile in the air went big Jim Goff.                  Next time pay day came around,                  Jim Goff a dollar short was found.                  When he asked, “What for?” came this reply,                  “You were docked for the time you was up in the sky.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What happened to Jim Goff on the job? How did Jim Goff’s employer treat him following his accident?</li> </ol>
<p><i>“Look for the Union Label” by the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees</i>                  Look for the union label                  when you are buying that coat, dress or blouse.                  Remember somewhere our union’s sewing,                  our wages going to feed the kids, and run the house.                  We work hard, but who’s complaining?                  Thanks to the I.L.G. we’re paying our way!                  So always look for the union label,                  it says we’re able to make it in the U.S.A.!</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Where should you look for a union label?</li> <li>6. Why is important to buy union made products?</li> </ol>	<p><b>From “Power of the Union”</b> by Si Kahn                  Some people never say no to the boss                  They take what they get for their labor                  Others will stand up whatever the cost                  And fight for the rights of their neighbor</p> <p>Some people never say what’s on their minds                  In a bad time you hardly can find them                  Others will stand up, the first in the line                  And hold on till there’s hundreds behind them</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Why does the song say “stand up whatever the cost”?</li> <li>10. From where does the union get its power?</li> </ol>

**A Guide to Labor Resources on the Internet**  
 by Janet Gruner

## African Voices

The majority of the websites listed below can be used as resources by teachers and students to engage in a critical examination of labor and the labor movement in the United States and to make comparisons with the experiences of workers in other nations. The sites are grouped into four categories. *Teaching and curriculum* sites are primarily for teachers looking for sample lesson plans, project ideas, and curriculum guides but also include material useful for student research. *Labor history* sites feature primary and secondary sources on a variety of labor history topics. *Activist organization and union* sites address contemporary labor issues in the United States and around the globe and often focus on controversies. *Government* sites provide information on laws, statistics, workers' rights, and current legislation.

### Teaching and Curriculum Sites

**1. History Matters** (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/>). This site has links to sites covering virtually every topic in U.S. history. Searchable by keyword or topic. It includes assignments using the web, online syllabi, helpful hints and lessons from experienced teachers, and guidelines for analyzing primary documents and evaluating websites. Its annotated list of sites on labor and labor movements is excellent.

**2. Ohio State Dept. of History Internet Projects** (<http://www.history.ohio-state.edu/webprojects.htm>). Includes "mini-projects" and a host of primary sources on various topics in American history. Focus on labor history includes "coal mining in the gilded age and progressive era" and "labor management conflict in American history." Provides photographs, political cartoons, including many by Thomas Nast, articles and essays, and first hand accounts from some of the workers themselves.

**3. Illinois Labor History Society** (<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs>). Provides information on labor in the United States from the colonial period to the present. Includes documents, lesson ideas, and a curriculum guide. Students can investigate strikes and mining disasters, biographical information on important labor leaders, and articles that analyze the development of the labor movement in the United States.

**4. Campaign to End Child Labor** (<http://www.boondocksnet.com/labor>). A highly informative site that focuses on the campaign to end child labor in the United States during the early 20th century. It contains a myriad of primary sources including photographs, poems, political cartoons, articles, essays, and legislation. This is an excellent resource for teachers looking to engage their students in a more in-depth examination of the harsh realities and detriments of child labor and of labor's struggles.

**5. History in Song Page** (<http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/parton/2/history.html>). This is a unique site that provides links to songs about different eras and events in American history, including the labor movement. It contains lyrics from various singers, including the socially conscious and labor friendly Woody Guthrie and Joe Hill, as well as a section entitled "songs of work and struggle" which includes a compilation of songs from "the mines" and from "the mills."

**6. U.S. Labor History** (<http://www.state.sd.us/deca/DDN4Learning/ThemeUnits/USLabor/general.htm>). This is a well-organized site that provides lesson plans and links to other sites that cover various aspects of labor history. It is informative without being overwhelming. The link to the *Library of Congress Learning Page* features countless lesson plans, activities, and project ideas. The link to *The Encyclopedia of Labor History* provides information on important leaders, events, and organizations in labor history.

**7. Four To Explore** (<http://www.42explore.com/labor.htm>) This site does provide links to pages on different people, events, organizations and issues important to the labor movement.

**8. Historical Voices: Remembering the Flint Sit-Down Strike** (<http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/#>). This site features a multi-media exhibit dedicated to the 1936 UAW organized strike at the General Motors plants in Flint, Michigan. Complete with audio clips, an interactive timeline, written material, a slideshow, and links to interactive activities such as a simulation of the strike, this site can be used to teach about more generalized aspects of the labor movement, such as the fight for unionization, through a specific case study.

**9. Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1775-2000** (<http://womhist.binghamton.edu/>). This site highlights the role of women throughout the broader timeline of American history and includes selected resources on labor history. It provides useful lesson ideas, sample DBQs, an archive of primary documents grouped by period, and several links to other teaching sites.

**10. American Labor History Study Guide** (<http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Quad/6460AmLabHist/>). This site offers students an online study guide that breaks down labor history into smaller, more manageable, periods of time such as "labor v. the robber barons" and "heyday of American socialism." Each

## African Voices

period is organized around a central theme and contains a succinct description of key events, issues, terms, concepts, and people as well as links to supplemental information. Similar summaries can be found <http://www.socialstudieshelp.com/> in either the American history or the economics sections.

### Labor History Sites

- 1. The History Place: Child Labor in America** (<http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor/>). This site contains photographs taken by Lewis Hine, who used his pictures as a medium to express his social concerns. His photos make history come alive and allow students to see children their age and younger working in mills, factories, mines, lumberyards, and orchards. The visual imagery and written material on the site, combined with the link provided to the UNICEF 1997 Conference on Child Labor can act as an excellent springboard for a discussion of the economic and ethical issues surrounding the child labor.
- 2. African American Labor History** (<http://www.afscme.org/about/afamlink.htm>). This site is a compilation of useful links relating to African American labor history including historical essays, primary documents, various biographies of important individuals, and a list of valuable book and film resources. The link to the “Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project” provides access to the texts of many of his speeches and sermons. The link to the “A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum” site contains information on Randolph, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and the place of African Americans in labor history.
- 3. On The Lower East Side: Observations of Life in Lower Manhattan at the Turn of the Century** (<http://140.190.128.190/History/contents.html>). This site is dedicated to workers on New York’s Lower East Side. It contains both primary and secondary sources that describe the different facets of the working class experience. It includes accounts of working class life from writers such as Jacob Riis, Abraham Cahan, and William Dean Howells, and the report of the Tenement House Committee of the Working Women’s Society detailing the poor living conditions for immigrant working groups in the city.
- 4. AFSCME Women’s Labor History** (<http://www.afscme.org/otherlnk/whlinks.htm>). This site is linked to sites on the role of women in labor and labor movements. Some of the links include: Rose Schneiderman’s “Lament for Lives Lost” speech given at a protest rally following the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, an in-depth description of what it was like to work in the Lowell textile mills entitled “Mill Girls,” and a protest song site that includes the song “Rebel Girl,” dedicated to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.
- 5. Jewish Women’s Archive: Emma Goldman Exhibit** (<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/goldman>). This site houses an exhibit on the life, beliefs, actions and legacy of Emma Goldman. It contains comprehensive biographical information and links to political cartoons, transcripts of her speeches, photographs, and the Emma Goldman papers. This site can be used to spur discussion on a variety of issues including the beliefs of anarchism, civil liberties, and class conflict.
- 6. Michigan State SLIR Labor History “Hot Links”** (<http://www.lir.msu.edu/hotlinks/laborhistory.htm>). This site contains links to approximately 50 different labor and labor history sites.
- 7. Harper’s Weekly** (<http://www.harppweek.com/default.asp>). While access to the article database requires a paid subscription, the site does provide access to several free features, including a searchable archive of the paper’s political cartoons and illustrations. Many focus on events in 19th century labor history and each cartoon comes with an explanation of the historical issue being critiqued by the cartoonist. This is a great resource for teachers looking to give their students practice with analyzing and interpreting political cartoons.
- 8. Lost Labor: Images of Vanished American Workers, 1900-1980** (<http://www.lostlabor.com>). This site contains over 100 photographs of workers in various industries that were taken to appear in company pamphlets and brochures. They differ markedly from the photographs of oppressed workers and terrible conditions that students are used to seeing and offer a great opportunity for comparison and discussion. The site includes a discussion of how these photographs can be viewed as propaganda designed to evoke pro-industry sentiments at a time when the labor movement was gaining momentum.
- 9. Cornell’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations** (<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/library/default.html>). This site features a great exhibit on the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire and offers access to statistical resources and data, public policy resources, article databases, and a host of other research tools.
- 10. Labor History Timeline** ([http://www.providence.edu/polisci/affigne/students/labor/labor\\_timeline\\_1806-present.htm](http://www.providence.edu/polisci/affigne/students/labor/labor_timeline_1806-present.htm)). This site briefly summarizes the major developments in labor history over the past two centuries and helps establish the causal relationships between events.

**11. Pittsburg and Western Penn. Labor Legacy** ([http://www.library.pitt.edu/labor\\_legacy/index.html](http://www.library.pitt.edu/labor_legacy/index.html)).

This site allows students (and teachers) to examine the more localized history of labor in Western Pennsylvania as a microcosm of the developments in the labor movement on the larger national scale. Particularly interesting are the scanned copies of original documents.

**12. WWW Virtual Library: Labour History** (<http://www.iisg.nl/~w3vl/>). This site links to sites related to labor and labor movements in the U.S. and around the world. The “U.S. Labor and Industrial History Audio Archive” contains audio clips of speeches and interviews with important labor figures such as Eugene Debs.

**13. Tamiment Library and Labor Archives** (<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/tam/index.html>). The home page for the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at NYU, a research facility dedicated to the history of “Labor and the Left.” There is an online exhibits on “Labor and the Holocaust.”

**Activist Organizations and Labor Union Sites**

**1. Labor Arts** (<http://www.laborarts.org/>). An online museum celebrating the achievements of the labor movement and workers, including labor cartoons, pamphlets, songs, photographs, buttons and murals. The site allows students to act as historians/anthropologists analyzing documents and artifacts from the past.

**2. International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF)** (<http://www.laborrights.org/home.html>). This site is meant to increase awareness of and disseminate information about violations of workers’ rights throughout the world in an effort to “achieve greater justice in the global economy.” In addition to promoting activism, the site features noteworthy news articles about current labor issues. This site allows students to draw connections between historical events or issues and their modern day implications.

**3. Human Rights for Workers** (<http://www.senser.com/>). This site features an online bulletin with a dual purpose: to raise people’s consciousness of the violations of workers’ human rights that have become increasingly frequent with the ever-widening process of globalization and to advocate regulatory practices on a national and international scale to protect worker’s rights. A similar workers’ rights advocacy site is <http://campaignforlaborrights.org/>. The Campaign for Labor Rights is dedicated to achieving “economic and social justice” by eliminating labor rights violations that are the product of the “global sweatshop.”

**4. Coalition of Labor Union Women** (<http://www.cluw.org/>). This site is unique in that it highlights women’s contributions to organized labor, addresses items of interest to working women such as contraceptive issues, and encourages women to take more active leadership roles in the workplace. CLUW is an umbrella organization that advocates for working women and celebrates their roles in the labor union movement, a role that is often overshadowed in a movements that was formerly dominated by.

**5. AFL-CIO Homepage** (<http://www.aflcio.org/>) This site, maintained by the nation’s largest umbrella labor organization, is an easily navigable and informative site that features links that address many labor-related points of interest. Particularly beneficial for classroom use are the links to information on political issues, corporate America, current events, and the economy. While this site has an obvious pro-union and pro-worker perspective, even those who may disagree philosophically with the organization will find the information provided about current issues lends itself well to examination, analysis and debate within the classroom. The **United Autoworkers** (<http://www.uaw.org/>) provide a similar site with links to current news items and legislative issues as well as to a magazine which features articles regarding labor issues.

**6. Labor Union Newstrove** (<http://laborunion.newstrove.com/>). This site maintains a collection of current news stories from the wires that have implications for labor relations around the world. It is updated frequently with that are highly accessible to student readers. Students can search for articles by topic or publication.

**7. New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)** (<http://www.nysut.org/>). This site is primarily for teachers. It discusses teacher rights, current legislative actions, and important issues in education. It features online news sites, state certification requirements, and teaching strategies from the “effective-teaching program.”

**8. The Labor Party** (<http://www.thelaborparty.org/>). The Labor Party proclaims itself a party “by and for working people” that is calling for changes that will promote “economic justice.” These changes include a proposal to amend the Constitution so that it ensures all people a job at a living wage.

**Government Sites**

**1. U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics** (<http://www.bls.gov/>). Provides a wealth of information on a vast range of topics including employment and unemployment, inflation and consumer spending, international business, and wages, earnings and benefits. While students may need guidance in

**African Voices**

understanding and analyzing the various statistics available on this site, it is certainly a tool they can use to understand aspects of labor such as the demographic characteristics of the labor force and the wage differences that exist between men and women. There are links to several excellent publications and research papers including the *Monthly Labor Review Online*. The BLS page links up to the Department of Labor homepage (<http://www.dol.gov/>) which also contains valuable information on a variety of labor related topics.

**2. National Labor Relations Board** (<http://www.nlr.gov>). A great site demonstrating to students the continued relevance of the history they are studying in class. It features a description of what the NLRB is, why it was created (to enforce the National Labor Relations Act, 1935), a weekly summary of its cases, access to its rules and regulations, and a variety of other pertinent information. The NLRB posts its decisions on this page, allowing students to examine labor relations cases in which workers had to fight for their rights.

**3. New York State Department of Labor** (<http://www.labor.state.ny.us/>) and **New Jersey State Department of Labor** (<http://www.state.nj.us/labor>). Provide practical information useful to those who either work or will one day be working in either state. They feature the commonplace information about working that students would not even realize they didn't know. There are links to pages about unemployment insurance, finding a job, laws pertaining to employers and employees, workers' rights and a variety of other work related issues.

**Jackdaw Examines Labor in the United States (www.jackdaw.com)**

*Triangle Shirtwaist Fire* (G-704F, grades 8-12, \$20.00). This Jackdaw explores the horrific Triangle Shirtwaist fire, from the events of the day and their aftermath, to the labor and immigration issues that were a major contributing factor, to the legal and social changes the tragedy eventually spawned. Primary source documents include: Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire photo-poster; Front page and partial page 6 of the Los Angeles Herald, March 26, 1911; and Excerpt from "Testimony of William L. Beers," New York City fire marshal.

*Labor Movement in America* (J-403, grades 7-12, \$ 43.00). Students will appreciate this Jackdaw's keen, historic view of the brutal labor conditions of earlier decades and of the modern-day labor movement that has produced vastly improved conditions, which may impact their own future careers. Primary source documents include: Rules of the Dover Manufacturing Company, early 1800s; AFL statement of purpose, 1893; Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World, c. 1905; and documents relating to the AFL-CIO merger, 1955.

*Child Labor: The Shame of the Nation* (J-PC100, \$ 33.00). Each Jackdaw Photo Collection consists of twelve, extra-large, 17" x 22", black-and-white photographs illustrating an important historical subject. Photos include "Breaker Boys," "Barefoot Girl in Mill," and "No Time for Rest: Newsboy Asleep in Stairwell."

*The Early Industrialization of America* (J-A32, grades 7-12, \$43.00). This Jackdaw offer students a story of ingenuity and daring; of exploitation and reward, as America struggled for economic independence and political stability through industrialization. Primary source documents include: Letter from Samuel Slater to employer, William Almy, 1795; Amoskeag Mill regulations, Manchester, New Hampshire, 1859; and maps showing principal canals, highways and railroads (1840-1860).

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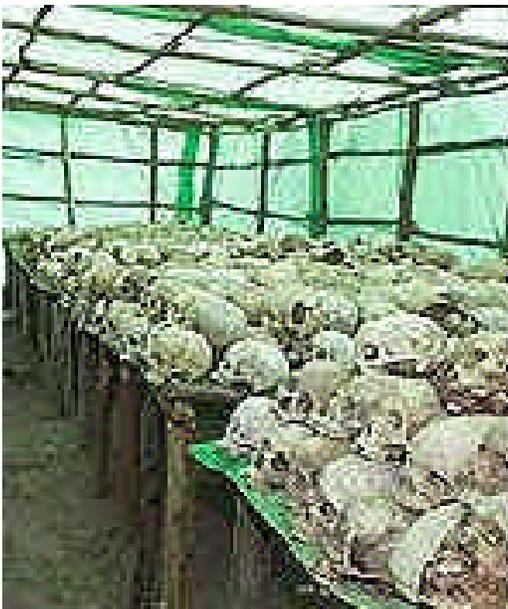
**African Voices:  
Tragedy and Possibility**

edited by Alan Singer

In the last unit of the Global History curriculum, high school students explore issues facing the world in the twenty-first century and review many of the key social studies concepts introduced during the study of earlier historical epochs. This series of articles under the umbrella title “African Voices” discusses the tragedies and possibilities confronting sub-Saharan Africa, a vast region of the world with 49 countries, an estimated population of 700 million people and an international debt of over 200 billion dollars. It uses first-person narratives to put a “personal face” on concepts such as colonialism, globalization, revolution, genocide, interdependence and development.



Jacqueline Murekatete writes as a survivor of genocide in Rwanda who is willing to speak with school groups about her experience. Her email address is jacquemu@hotmail.com. At the time she prepared this autobiographical essay, Jackie was a student at Martin Van Buren H.S. in Queens, NY. Her social studies teacher was Dr. Norman Strauss. Jackie received editorial assistance from Lisa Torre, a secondary education student at Hofstra University.



A table covered with skulls from the Rwandan genocide. Source: news.bbc.co.uk.

Rebecca King Dyasi is a teacher educator at Long Island University-Brooklyn Campus. In this article she describes her memories of the movement for independence in Sierra Leone and her thoughts on the warfare that has divided the country since the early 1990s. Mariama Bah, a student at Middle School 61 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, is a refugee from this war and her story is included. Her social studies teacher was Hamid Balogun. Dr. Dyasi received editorial assistance from Kerry King, a secondary education student at Hofstra University.

Lerole David Mametja was born in Pietersburg in a northern province of South Africa. He is currently a student at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University in New York City. In this article he discusses the movement against apartheid in South Africa, his personal transformation into an activist, and his work as a health planner in a nation besieged by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. He also received editorial assistance from Kerry King.

Dr. Arnold Wendroff is a Brooklyn resident who has worked in Africa as a member of the Peace Corps. He noticed that in rural villages many African women carried heavy loads, including a family’s daily water supply, on their heads. Dr. Wendroff invented a handcart that can be made entirely from wood and used bicycle parts. This article addresses the question: Is Sustainable Development Possible in Africa?

*100 Days of Genocide in Rwanda*

by Jacqueline Murekatete

**Introduction:** Rwanda is a small, mountainous and landlocked country in east-central Africa with a population of approximately seven and a half million people. Its neighbors include the Congo to the west and Tanzania to the east. Most of the workforce is involved in agriculture and major products include coffee, tea, and bananas. Approximately 55% of the people are Roman Catholic, almost 20% are Protestant, and about 25% practice indigenous religions. Its largest ethnic groups are the Hutu (80%) and the Tutsi (19%). The national literacy rate is about 50%. Rwanda was first visited by European explorers in 1854 and became a German colony in 1890. Following World War I it was given to Belgium as a League of Nations mandate and it remained under Belgium's control until it secured independence in 1962.

I was born on November 8, 1984, in a district of Rwanda known as Gitarama. We lived in a small village where both of my parents were farmers. They grew crops such as yams, peas and beans. My parents had seven children. I was the second oldest.

Rwanda is a small country in central Africa with fewer people than New York City. Most Rwandans are members of one of two ethnic groups. They are either Hutus or Tutsis. The Hutus are the majority. My family and I belonged to the minority group, the Tutsis. There are stereotypes that Tutsis are usually tall and have long noses, while the Hutus are short with broader features, but if you are a foreigner it is not easy to tell the difference between Hutus and Tutsis. We speak the same language, live in the same villages and attend the same schools and churches. Most people in Rwanda are Roman Catholic.

**Tutsi and Hutu**

If you were born in Rwanda, you always knew whether you were a Tutsi or a Hutu. When you were registered for school, it was required that your ethnic group be listed. One of the major adult identification cards also listed a person's ethnicity. There has been little intermarriage between Hutus and Tutsis. A child's ethnicity is determined by his or her father's ethnic groups. For example, if a Hutu man married a Tutsi woman, the children were considered Hutus. My father never taught us to hate Hutus and since we went to the same schools, my brothers, sisters and I had both Hutu kids and Tutsi kids as friends.

According to history, the Tutsis were cow herders in the distant past and the Hutus were farmers. As a monarchy, Rwanda was ruled by Tutsi kings. Our country became a European colony after World War I and the colonial power, Belgium, started the ID system. They did this to divide Rwandans and make it easier to conquer and govern our country. European colonists helped Hutus rebel against the Tutsi kings when the monarchy

demanded independence. Bloodshed between the Tutsis and Hutus started in 1959 as Rwanda prepared for independence. Some Tutsis were killed and others fled to neighboring countries. The new government was controlled by the Hutu majority and there was discrimination against Tutsis in public schools and public jobs. At the beginning of the 1990s, a rebel group known as the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) started to fight against the government. It was led by Tutsis who had fled the country after the trouble in 1959 and wanted to return to their homeland. However, before 1994 there was no trouble in my village. I had never experienced any sort of violence between the Hutus and the Tutsis.

In April, 1994, the President of Rwanda, who was Hutu, fled to a neighboring country to negotiate peace with the RPF. On his way back, his plane was shot and he died. The government accused Tutsis of being spies for the RPF and murdering the president. I believe the president's death was just an excuse used by the government to justify genocide against the Tutsis and that the attacks had been planned in advance. One of the first steps in their campaign was the dehumanization of Tutsi people. On a daily basis, radio broadcasts called us "inyenzi" or cockroaches, inciting our Hutu neighbors to start killing us. A few days later, we heard about Tutsis being massacred in other parts of Rwanda. In my village, we thought these things were just rumors. We could not believe it was actually happening.

A couple of days later, spring break ended and it was time for me to go back to school. I attended school in my grandmother's village and I stayed there with my mom's mother. My father was afraid to let me go there because the Hutus in neighboring villages had begun setting up barricades in the streets where they were checking ID cards and attacking Tutsis using machetes and clubs. In the villages, the genocide was carried out by machetes and clubs and any other weapons that the killers had.

When I got to my grandmother's village, I noticed that things had changed. Some days my cousins and I would go to the nearby hills and from there we would see smoke rising from nearby villages. Tutsis were being killed and their homes burned. About a week later, the kids realized that school was not going to start and the adults started to face the reality that our lives were in danger. We needed to flee and find a place to hide if we had any hope of survival. About 10 o'clock one morning, my grandmother and I were in the fields getting potatoes for lunch. We heard people screaming and saw them running. Smoke was rising from houses not far from where we lived. Hutus had started killing Tutsis in our village.

### **Genocide**

My grandmother and I went back to the house where we met some of my uncles, cousins and other relatives. We decided to run to the County Administrative Office. During the genocide, the most common places to seek refuge were government offices where we thought authorities would protect us or in churches since people believed that nobody would enter a church and commit murder. Little did we know that there would be a time when neither the church nor the county office would provide protection, that government officials would assist the killers and that some priests and nuns would join the perpetrators of the genocide. We stayed at the county office for a few days. At night, Hutu mobs would come with weapons to wake us up and Tutsi men would go out to try to defend us. Each night there were casualties on both sides, but mostly on the Tutsi side because we were outnumbered.

My uncle, who was a doctor, lived in one of the cities of Rwanda. One night, he sent an ambulance, with a driver who was a Hutu, to pick up my grandmother and me. We packed the few things that we had and the driver hid us in the back of the ambulance with clothes and other stuff on top of us. At the barricade, he told the Hutus that he was taking the ambulance back to the hospital. They believed the driver and did not search it. After the genocide I learned that a few days after we left the county office, all of the Tutsis there had been massacred. Most of them were my relatives.

When we arrived in the city, my uncle paid a Hutu neighbor to hide us. During this time I had no contact whatsoever with my father, my mother or my brothers and sisters. There was no way that I could go back to my village without being killed. One morning, a Hutu mob came to the house where my

grandmother and I were hidden. They stormed the door, came in screaming, and demanded to know what we were doing there. I remember seeing bloody clubs and thinking that our lives were over. The Hutu who was hiding us lied to them, claiming that my grandmother's husband was a Hutu and that she had come to be near the hospital to get some treatment. They actually left us alone, but the Hutu who was hiding us told us that we had just been lucky and would have to leave because they would mostly like come back the next day. There was an orphanage nearby operated by Italian priests and my grandmother decided to place me there for protection. It was only taking in children because it was too dangerous for them to hide adults. The soldiers or the killers were stationed at the entrance and would not allow the Italian priests to protect Tutsi men or women. At first, I refused to go because I did not want to leave my grandmother. But she finally persuaded me to go by telling me she would find someone to hide her, the killing would soon be over, and she would come to get me. Finally, the Hutu brought me to the orphanage.

### **The Orphanage**

I spent most of the 100 days of genocide at the orphanage. Each day we had more kids arrive whose parents had been killed and it grew very crowded. Some of the children had hands or arms cut off by the killers. Sometimes parents dropped off their children for safety and then they would try to find a place to hide from the Hutus. There were many instances where I witnessed Tutsi men and women being dragged to their deaths by the killers as they tried to climb the fences of the orphanage. In the orphanage, little children cried every night for their parents. We did not have enough food in the orphanage and many children died from malnutrition or diseases that spread because of the overcrowding. It got to the point that the priests built a cemetery inside the orphanage. Every day or so we all went to the cemetery, the priests would say a prayer, and they would bury a child. It became almost like a daily routine. I was fortunate to never get really sick. Every night, I prayed that the whole thing would be over soon and then I would go back home and see my family.

Finally the RPF soldiers captured the Rwanda capital and the war and genocide were almost over. However, we were still in danger. Once, Hutu soldiers who were trying to escape, came to the orphanage and told the Italian priests that they were going to finish the job and exterminate all the Tutsis, including the children and babies. They herded us

## African Voices

into the cafeteria and made us sing their victory songs. Soldiers walked up the aisle in middle of the cafeteria pointing guns at us and pushing around the priests. The children cried and we thought, "they are going to kill us." But the priests convinced them we could do them no harm and offered them money to leave us. The day after the Hutu soldiers left, the RPF reached the orphanage and stopped the genocide. The RPF soldiers then loaded us into trucks and brought us to a refuge camp where we stayed in tents. There was not enough food or clean water in the camp and children continued to die. After a month, they brought us back to the orphanage. I was almost ten years old when all of this happened. I do not know how I managed to escape the killers in the several instances when I came face to face with them. I believe that God was responsible for my safety.

At this point, the children who were lucky enough to have a relative who survived the 100 days of genocide started to leave the orphanage. If you were very lucky, your mother and father came to get you. I did not know if my parents were alive or if anyone in my family even knew where I was. Every night I cried and hoped that somebody would come for me. Finally, one morning, the priests called my name and said that somebody had come for me. I started crying tears of joy and wondered who had come for me. It turned out to be my cousin, my mother's sister's daughter. She and her father had

managed to survive, but I later learned that the rest of her family, her mother, brothers and sisters were all dead. They had been burned alive in their home by their Hutu neighbors.

My uncle, the one who had sent the ambulance to rescue my grandmother and me from the county office, had managed to survive and he sent my cousin to find me. He had dug a hole in one of the rooms of the house of a Hutu man who had agreed to hide him and he stayed in that hole during the genocide. The man who was hiding my uncle would bring him food and water whenever he thought it was safe.

I asked my cousin if she had news of my family or my grandmother; if she knew anything. She knew but she could not tell me. She did not know how I would react when I learned that they had all been killed. I later learned that my grandmother had been beaten to death. My parents, along with my brothers and sister had all been slaughtered by our Hutu neighbors and their bodies had been thrown into the river near our village.

Soon my uncle arranged for me to live with another uncle in the United States. He felt it would be less painful for me in this country. It was also very dangerous for me to visit my parent's land after the genocide because there were no Tutsis left in our village. I left Rwanda at the end of 1995 and I have never returned since then.

### *Colonial Life, Independence and War in Sierra Leone*

by Rebecca King Dyasi

**Introduction:** Sierra Leone is a small country on the west coast of Africa with a population of a little over 5 million people. It is a very diverse society. Approximately 40% of the people are Islamic, 35% are Christian and 20% practice indigenous religions. Its largest African ethnic groups are the Temne and Mende and there are small Creole, European, Lebanese and Asia communities. The national literacy rate is less than 25% and most of the population is poor. The main industries are agriculture (palm oil, coffee and cocoa), light manufacturing and mining (diamonds, bauxite and iron ore). The struggle to control the diamond and bauxite mines is behind much of the recent national conflict. , Sierra Leone was a colony of Great Britain, who maintained control until independence was declared in 1961. Since independence, it has been governed by a series of military governments. Sierra Leone's only democratically elected government took office in 1996, but it held power for less than a year. During the 1990s, Sierra Leone was torn apart by a vicious war to gain control over its diamond mines.

I was born in November, 1944 on the island of Bonthe in Sierra Leone. At the time, my country was a colony of Great Britain. Bonthe was a peaceful island with lots of nesting seabirds and turtles and big ship building yards. It was the port for the city of Freetown and an important stop on the shipping routes along the Atlantic coast between Europe and

the Cape of Good Hope. For centuries, ships stopped there for fresh water.

My mother and father were farmers who branched out into other occupations. My father had attended the British secondary school in Freetown, the capital city. A respected tribal elder, he was appointed by the chief as a local court judge. My mother managed a small dry goods shop on the

mainland in the village of Jangalo. She sold fabric, kerosene, lamps and hardware; everything but food. We would travel from Bonthe to Jangalo in a little wood dug-out boat loaded with farm products, mainly palm nuts, palm oil and palm fronds, which we used to make brooms for export.

Growing up in Sierra Leone, I learned to speak a number of languages. My father's principle language was Shabu and my mother spoke Mende, so I had to learn both of these languages. Because we traveled to other areas and had to communicate with different people, I also learned to speak Temne, Creole and English.

### **My Family**

I am from a large extended family and we had relatives all over the region. My father had two wives and a total of fifteen children. He was also one of twelve children. My mother had twelve children, but four died when they were very young. I am her youngest. Because my mother was my father's first wife, I was considered the daughter of both of them. They lived in neighboring villages and I would do chores for both households.

While I attended school I lived with different family members. As a young child, an aunt brought me to Freetown where I went to elementary school, which we called "boxing school." Once, I traveled with a niece of my father to the town of Matrué where I helped sell trade goods and attended a boarding school. Later, I returned to Bonthe and went to a school operated by American missionaries.

Because Sierra Leone was a British colony, children were educated using a standard British curriculum and the teachers were mainly from Great Britain. When we studied history, we studied the history of England, Europe and the British Commonwealth. The only time we learned about Africa was when we studied Europe's involvement. Schools flew the British flag and tests were written by and shipped from the education department in England. Students attended primary school for six years and then went to secondary school. At the end of secondary school, we took a difficult 11th plus exam which determined whether you could continue your education and what subjects you would study.

The independence movement in Sierra Leone began after World War II. Some of the men fought in that war and they learned more about what was going on in the rest of the world. Because of its natural port, ships from all over the world arrived in Sierra Leone during the war. This contributed to opening up people's eyes and a consciousness favoring independence started to develop. My first

memory of the independence movement was a political rally I stumbled into accidentally while in Freetown in 1950 or 1951. I was about seven years old and was sent by an older cousin on an errand to purchase cigarettes. I happened upon this enormous crowd on Adelaide Street, not far from the police station, where a labor union leader named Shaka Stevens was giving a speech. Stevens helped to build a united labor movement in Sierra Leone and later became president of the country.

I was a high school student at a mission school in 1961 when the country finally secured independence. I had to walk a mile and a half to the school and I witnessed constant protests against British colonial rule. Often there were strikes and rioting as workers complained about low pay and demanded independence. I still remember the day when the missionaries had us lower the British flag and raise the new flag of Sierra Leone. While there was much anticipation, many of us were not sure what independence would bring and uncertain about the future.

### **University Education**

Because I did well on my school exams, I was able to attend the university in the city of Jala where I studied to become a Biology and Earth Science teacher. This university was affiliated with the University of Illinois in the United States. After graduation, I was hired by the university to help start a teacher's center where we would prepare new teachers and develop our own educational curriculum for Sierra Leone. The excitement of independence spilled over into the school system and we were thinking how we could draw on local ideas and resources to enhance and enrich science education.

The first time I left Sierra Leone was in the academic year 1969-1970 when I went to London to advance my education. When I returned home I got married, started teaching in a teaching training college and then taught science in a secondary school until 1978. My husband is from South Africa and he has a Ph.D. in science education. He was invited to teach in the United States at Illinois University. While we were there I earned both my Master's degree and Ph.D.

From the beginning, there were tensions in our new country, especially between the Creoles that lived in the Freetown area and the rest of the country. Because of these tensions, Sierra Leone has been ruled by my military governments for most of its history as a nation. The Freetown people were not originally from Sierra Leone. They were ex-slaves from Nova Scotia who had been resettled in

## African Voices

Africa by the British. One of my grandfathers was a descendant of the freed Africans but when he married my grandmother he moved into the interior and joined her people.

### Civil War

The problems that led to civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s had their roots in a civil war in neighboring Liberia. The boundary between Sierra Leone and Liberia was drawn by the colonial powers and it is arbitrary. There is no real border, so some people actually sleep in a home in one country while they farm in the next. Many refugees from the Liberian civil war came to Sierra Leone and Freetown became very crowded. Sierra Leone also attracted mercenaries from Liberia who were searching for food and supplies and hoping to find diamonds. The influx of refugees and mercenaries added to the tension between the different regions of Sierra Leone. People in the inland part of the country felt they were not represented in the government and were not as developed economically as Freetown. Soon Sierra Leone was plunged into civil war as well. At the center of the conflict was the struggle to control the diamonds.



Panning for diamonds. Source: [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)

A major problem facing Sierra Leone and other African nations today is that the wealth of these nations is usually not owned by its people. The diamond, bauxite and titanium mines of Sierra Leone are owned by foreign companies. The titanium mines are destroying the environment in Sierra Leone,

especially the rich farmland, forest area and fresh water of the coastal region.

As a result of the mining, the area is being overrun by the sea and the American owners do not seem to care. When the mining companies leave, nothing is left and the people become very disgruntled. In Sierra Leone, the economic and political system does not seem to be working for the benefit of the people of the country. I am not sure who to blame, but I know the system is not working.

### It Was A Horrible Time

by Mariama Bah

I was born in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, in 1987. I lived there with my mother, my sister and my brother. My father went to the United States to find work.

While I was still a young girl, there was a civil war in Sierra Leone between the “village” people and the “city” people. It was a horrible time. The rebels were from the villages. They walked around with rifles, cursing at people. If they caught someone they did not like, they cut off the person’s hand, a foot, or sometimes both hands.

My neighbor was captured by the rebels. They gave him a choice. They said that they would either cut off both of his hands or kill both of his children. He had them cut off his hands. Now he can do nothing for himself. His wife must feed him and wash him.

When the rebels came, my mother took us to hide in the hills. We walked for two days without food and water. When we went home we found that our house was burned down. My father’s younger brother was dead.

We came to the United States to live with my father in Brooklyn. I heard that the civil war was fought over diamonds. I do not know if it is really true.