



GUIDE TO TEACHING LABOR'S STORY

Incorporate the experiences of working men, women and children into your existing curriculum with professionally selected & resourced documents

Source Selection and Teaching Guide by Jon Shelton, Associate Professor of Democracy and Justice Studies, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

<p>Historical Era</p> <p>THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN AMERICA (1890-1930)</p> <p>Document 7.2</p>	<p>Document Title: Why Teachers Should Organize</p> <p>Document Type: Speech</p> <p>BRIEF DESCRIPTION:</p> <p>This document is an excerpted speech given by teacher union leader Margaret Haley to the general assembly of the National Education Association in 1904. It was also published in the <i>Journal of Education</i>.</p>
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SOURCING THE SOURCE

Margaret Haley, a sixth-grade teacher and Vice President of the first teacher union in the US (the Chicago Teachers' Federation) gave this speech at the National Education Association's [NEA] annual meeting in 1904. At that time, the NEA was not a union but an organization dedicated to advancing the cause of public education. The NEA included teachers and administrators from around the country. For several years before the speech, Haley and other female teachers had been organizing to advance their interests within an NEA whose leadership was dominated by male administrators. In fact, Haley's address was the product of an organized effort by female classroom teachers to allow their voices to be heard in the NEA. Haley's ultimate goal in this address was to legitimize teacher unionism and inspire other teachers to organize in order to advance democracy in education.

Intended Audience:

Haley hoped to lay out a convincing argument to teachers, administrators, and the general public, not just for "why teachers should organize," but also for a more democratic vision of public education in the United States. In this speech Haley exhorts teachers to understand their special responsibility to fight for an education system capable of restraining the impulse of education reformers to narrow the curriculum and train the vast majority of students to be cogs in an industrial machine.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOURCE

□ **Historical Context:**

In the late 1800s, public school teachers found themselves at the center of a high-stakes conversation over the purpose of public schools in the United States. Public schools had long been seen as foundational for inculcating citizenship in American democracy. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, some elite reformers wanted to take away teachers' discretion in the classroom, which many teachers viewed as a threat to public education. Teachers like Haley and other Progressive era intellectuals believed that revitalizing the democratic imperative of education was necessary to save the United States from the growing power of corporations.

Teachers in Chicago formed the nation's first teacher union in response to broader political and economic changes sweeping the United States in the late nineteenth century. At that time, the city was emblematic of the direction of American capitalism during the Gilded Age. A handful of American business magnates amassed unprecedented wealth in large part from the labor of millions of immigrant workers who toiled for low wages in dangerous working conditions. In Chicago, owners of meatpacking operations, like Gustavus Swift, built enormous fortunes, while Haley and other Chicago teachers taught the sons and daughters of impoverished working families such as the fictional Rudkus family depicted in Upton Sinclair's famous novel *The Jungle* (1906). As this population exploded, so did class sizes.

Though their wages were more stable than many other workers at the time, teachers taught for low pay with little long-term economic security.

While classroom teachers struggled to meet both their own needs and the needs of their students, education reformers sought to centralize control over public education and to shape it in ways that would subordinate it to business-style managerial techniques, taking away discretion from teachers. These reformers were trying to wrest control from working class communities in order to break the hold of urban political machines and, in their view, to ensure that new generations of Americans were fit for industrial labor.

Organized in 1897, the Chicago Teacher Federation [CTF] had been initially formed by elementary school teachers like Margaret Haley, virtually all of whom were women, for better salaries and pensions. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the American teaching force had become increasingly feminized. By 1850, a majority of American teachers were women, and by 1900, the teaching force was 70% female.¹ This gender disparity increased in large part because female teachers could be paid less. Indeed, as late as 1906, the average female teacher made 38% less than a male teacher.² Further, at a time when female teachers were expected not to get married, the lack of any provision for old age meant that when most teachers retired, they had to rely on private charities or family members for support.

Though the union was initially formed to push for teachers' economic security, Haley's rise to prominence in the union brought the CTF into the broader terrain of class politics. This speech, at the national convention of the NEA, occurred in the midst of the fight to defend the democratic purpose of education in the city against the growing power of corporations. Haley's career as a CTF activist (and later as a founding member of the American Federation of Teachers in 1916), fused the fight for teacher working conditions with the needs of students. Haley led the union in a years-long campaign, culminating in a court case, to force some of Chicago's most prominent and politically-connected corporations to pay their fair share of taxes. She later mobilized teachers and the working-class community in the city to defeat a plan to remake the schools into a

¹ Johan Neem, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 118.

² Geraldine Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 49.

two-tiered system of vocational training for working class children and a more robust liberal education for the kids of middle class families.

We should acknowledge that, like many white progressives of the time, however, Haley did not seem to consider the growing African American population in Chicago to be a part of the community for which she was willing to fight. By the time of this speech, African Americans had begun moving to Chicago from the South. According to the 1900 census, the black population of Chicago had grown to around 30,000. The jobs available to African Americans were even more precarious than for European immigrants, and as more blacks came to the city in the years that followed, the school system grew increasingly segregated. In the words of one historian, Haley “resolutely ignored the problems faced by African American students and teachers in Chicago’s increasingly divided school system.”³

□ **Meaning and Significance of the Source**

Haley’s speech was designed to offer an intellectual rationale for teacher unionism at a time when organizing for political and economic power seemed like a radical departure from the docility and deference to authority many Americans expected of teachers. This speech also served the polemical purpose of a call to action for American teachers. In the fusing of these two purposes, Haley created a timeless, articulate statement for why teachers need unions.

Teachers must organize, Haley argued, because only they could ensure that the public purpose of education was met. For her, the promise of public education was hamstrung by the myriad problems facing teachers, who were on the front lines of ensuring education was democratic and meaningful to students. These problems included insufficient pay, limited retirement benefits, and enormous class sizes. Haley was not shy about articulating the economic and social needs of teachers; and yet, the stakes of her argument were bigger, as along with the diminished conditions under which teachers taught and students learned, the teacher also faced the “increased tendency toward ‘factoryizing education.’” If teachers could not exercise their own judgment in a democratic school, Haley asked, how could they expect their students to become active citizens in a democracy?

Haley also made evident the connection between labor organization and the public good during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. This move was important because she was trying to explain to educators—who often considered themselves to be above other working people and were often not interested in organizing unions—why they must form unions in order to save democracy itself.

Haley argued that teachers represented a group that could help society more fully engage the growing conflict between labor and capital during the Gilded Age, pointing out that “if there is one body of public servants of whom the public has a right to expect the mental and moral equipment to face the labor question...it is the public school teachers, whose special contribution to society is their own power to think, the moral courage to follow their convictions, and the training of citizens to think and to express thought in free and intelligent action.”

Indeed, the purpose of education, to Haley, was to teach children to think and to be citizens in a democracy, not to enhance the skills of employees. The fight for industrial democracy in society was the same as the struggle for democracy in education, and unions were crucial to both.

³ Kate Rousmaniere, “Being Margaret Haley, Chicago, 1903,” *Paedagogica Historica* 39 (2003): 10.

Haley’s speech concluded with a clear call to action to the teachers in the room: “It will be well indeed if the teachers...face all that the labor unions have faced with the same courage and perseverance.” Haley’s articulation of why teachers should organize, then, showed that teachers were workers like any other, but they were also more than that: their work was also to teach other Americans to be citizens in a democracy, an idea under threat from corporate-modeled education reform.

Despite the glaring omission of African Americans in Haley’s view of the democratic polity this speech provides value for teacher union activists today who hope to link teacher working conditions to student learning conditions.

GLOSSARY

Chicago Teachers Federation (CTF)—Organized in 1897, the CTF was the nation’s first teacher union. It became a charter member of the nation’s longest-lasting teacher union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), in 1916.

Gilded Age—A term coined by the writer Mark Twain, the “Gilded Age” refers to the era between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century when a handful of wealthy Americans accrued massive fortunes and increased their power in both politics and in the economy.

***The Jungle* (1906)**—A novel written by Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* sought to tell the story of the immiseration of working class people such the fictional Lithuanian immigrant family that serves as the book’s protagonists.

National Education Association (NEA)—Originally formed in 1857 (as the National Teachers Association) the NEA was an organization made up of educators at all levels for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pushed by its members and by the successes of the more militant AFT in the 1960s, the NEA became a union and is now the single largest union in the United States.

Progressive Era—There is a lack of scholarly consensus on what defines the Progressive Era, but generally speaking the Progressive Era refers to the era in US History from around 1890-1917, in which middle-class and some working-class reformers sought to use government action to solve mounting social problems brought on by the Gilded Age, including wealth inequality, poor labor conditions, and urban slums.

“labor question”—The “labor question” – who will do the work and under what political and economic conditions – was the source of growing conflict between labor and capital during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The era was defined by violent and existential conflict between labor unions and employers—such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller—willing to use violent methods to prevent workers from organizing for better wages, safer conditions, and more job security.

QUESTIONS -- DISCUSSION POINTS

Source Specific

- How does Haley connect the working and living conditions of teachers to the cause of democracy in the schools?
- According to Haley, how are the goals of teacher unions similar to those of other unions? How are they different?
- According to Haley, what two ideals are “struggling for supremacy in American life today”?
- According to Haley, what impact has “the organization of [industrial] workers for mutual aid” had on the United States?

Historical Era - essential questions

- What does the argument Haley makes here for teacher unionism tell us about the state of the American economy and political system in the early twentieth century?
- How does Haley’s argument help us understand how corporate reformers hoped to change the public education system during this era? How does her argument help us understand how Progressive activists like Haley hoped to shape public education?

Labor & Working Class History – essential questions

- Based on this document, how would you characterize the labor movement’s response to the increasing inequalities of wealth and power that marked the early twentieth century?
- To what extent does this document reveal a sense of solidarity between teachers and industrial workers, and to what extent a desire to differentiate teachers from industrial workers?
- How might we compare the problems Haley lays out in this speech to the problems faced by teachers and students in American public schools today?

CITATION

Haley, Margaret. “Why Teachers Should Organize,” *Journal of Education*, Vol. 60, No. 13 (September 29, 1904): 215-216, 222.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Clifford, Geraldine. *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

Murphy, Marjorie. *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

Rousmaniere, Kate. *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

Rousmaniere, Kate. “Being Margaret Haley, Chicago, 1903,” *Paedagogica Historica* 39 (2003), 5-18.

Shelton, Jon. “Teacher Unionism in America: Lessons from the Past for Defending and Deepening Democracy,” *American Educator*, 42:1 (2018), 30-35, 40.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS and STANDARDS

Curricular Connections:

[NCHS US ERA 7 Standard 1](#): **How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization and political corruption.**

This document reveals the ways in which industrial capitalism affected areas of public life that were not directly linked to the economy; in this case, public education and the meaning and practice of democracy. It offers insight into profound differences in the ways different “reformers” (corporate reformers and teacher-educator reformers) addressed the problems of industrial capitalism. It also raises profound questions about what constitutes democracy and democratic participation.

Common Core Standards: [<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/>]

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.rh.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5 Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.