

Socialists and Wobblies

Today's generation of young adults have a difficult time imagining the early twentieth century. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a time when there were 100,000 registered Socialists, 1,200 of whom held elected offices; when there were 4,000 labor strikes in a single year; when an avowed Socialist ran for president and received 900,000 votes; when women put their lives on the line for the right to vote. These were heady times, full of spirited resistance to a system that had ignored working Americans for far too long.

Almost a hundred years later, the actions and deeds of those who dared to question the establishment are vivid reminders of our power as ordinary Americans. It is an important message—the power of our dissenting voices and of our commitment to a more egalitarian society for our students to hear.

Document-Based Questions

MOTHER JONES

1. What is a “motley gathering”? Do you think Mother Jones would have described her audience in the same manner as did the reporter?
2. Do you think this speech aroused the audience from its “lethargy”? How and why? Might it have moved you to action if you had been a worker in the audience? Explain.
3. Why do you think that, although she “violated injunction after injunction,” Mother Jones was not re-arrested? What made Mother Jones an especially dangerous radical in the eyes of the corporate owners?

UPTON SINCLAIR

1. Do you agree with Sinclair's “two carefully worded propositions,” describ-

ing what a Socialist believes? Do you think he has appropriately described what an anarchist believes? How might you change his descriptions?

2. Why do you think Dr. Schliemann's "formula of modern proletariat thought" did not attract enough of the American proletariat to enact the restructuring of the country's political, social, and economic structure at the turn of the century?
3. How would you answer the question Sinclair posed, "Do you think that it would be too much to say that two hours of the working time of every efficient member of a community goes to feed the red fiend of war"? Could this same formula be applied in the early twenty-first century?

W.E.B. DU BOIS

1. What is the "peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness" that W. E. B. Du Bois describes? How and why do African Americans in today's world continue to cope with this sensation?
2. How did Du Bois describe the African Americans' "vain search for freedom"? How did this search contribute to the "new vision" that replaced the "dream of political power"? What was the vision?
3. What are Du Bois's dreams for a better future? Which do you believe were accomplished in his lifetime? Which remain to be accomplished?

EMMA GOLDMAN

1. How does Emma Goldman describe patriotism? Do you think most Americans would similarly describe patriotism in the early twenty-first century?
2. Do you think Goldman makes a convincing argument for her belief that patriotism is a "menace to liberty"? What are her strongest and weakest points?
3. Goldman repeatedly mentions the growth of solidarity in her address. What evidence do you find in her address, as well as within the other voices in this chapter, of such solidarity?

“PROCLAMATION OF THE STRIKING TEXTILE WORKERS”

1. Why do you think this proclamation resonated with workers from around the world? Do you think it might have had greater support from abroad than from within the United States? How and why?
2. The proclamation is deliberately modeled on the language and format of the Declaration of Independence. Do you think this structure and style is effective? Do you think the two tyrannies—the tyranny of the Crown and the tyranny of the mill owners—are comparable? How and why?
3. Why do you think the city government and local police upheld the rights of the mill owners rather than the strikers?

ARTURO GIOVANITTI

1. What is the “ethical side” of striking that Arturo Giovanitti describes? Do you think these are just the words of “dreamers” or “fanatics”—a question he poses to the District Attorney?
2. President Abraham Lincoln stated that the Union could not exist “half free and half slave.” Why does Giovanitti—who wrote fifty years later—feel that America was still “half free and half slave”?
3. Why do you think the jury acquitted Giovanitti?

WOODY GUTHRIE

1. To whom is this song addressed? Who is the “you” who “would kill our children,” and whose “soldiers” were waiting while the miners slept?
2. Guthrie mentions “wire fence corners” twice. What is he describing? Why is this important to understanding the song—or is it?

JULIA MAY COURTNEY

1. Julia May Courtney predicted that, “every workingman in Colorado and in America will not forget” the cry, “Remember Ludlow.” Is this true? If not, why?
2. Do you think the statement, “[F]or the first time in the history of the labor

war in America the people are with the strikers” was correct? Do you think the people did support them? Why, or why not? Why would they support these strikers and not others?

3. Do you think there is another side to the Ludlow Massacre, other than that presented by Courtney and Guthrie? How would that side justify its actions?

JOE HILL

1. Why do you think Joe Hill cabled Haywood from his jail cell and told him, “Don’t waste time mourning. Organize!”? Do you think Haywood and other organizers honored Hill’s request?
2. Why do you think Joe Hill remains a hero for those involved in the contemporary struggles related to labor?
3. What “fading flower” do you think Joe Hill would wish to see “come to life and bloom again”?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 13, “Socialists and Wobblies”

After reading Chapter 13 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are five possible main points.

1. Early twentieth-century radicalism in the United States was fueled by overseas wars, miserable working conditions, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, and unremitting poverty.
2. Socialism reached the height of its popularity in America during the early twentieth century.
3. Despite almost three hundred years of victimization, many African Americans approached the turn of the twentieth century with dreams for a better future.
4. To some workers in the United States labor movement, true freedom for the working-class depended on the abolition of “wage slavery.”
5. Union membership and activity grew at an unprecedented rate during the early twentieth century.

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 13, “Socialists and Wobblies,”
and in *A People’s History*, Chapter 13,
“The Socialist Challenge”

If your students are also reading *A People’s History*, they should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points in Chapter 13 in both books. Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People’s History* are used together.

6. War and imperialistic impulses postponed, but did not suppress, the class conflict brewing in America at the turn of the century.
7. While the Wobblies (the IWW) never had a huge membership at any given time, their energy, commitment, inspiration to others, and ability to mobilize made them far more influential in the country than their numbers might suggest.
8. Progressive Era reforms were intended to “stabilize the capitalist system by repairing its worse defects, blunt the edge of the Socialist movement, and restore some measure of class peace” (*People’s History*, p. 354).
9. During this period, socialism moved out of the small circles of city immigrants and “became American.”
10. Women of the early twentieth century were members of a pioneering generation who set the agenda for social reform for the next several decades.

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 13, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. How is the “wage slavery” described by Mother Jones similar to that described by many of the voices in Chapter 11?
2. Were conditions better or worse for the working poor in the early twentieth century than they had been in the Gilded Age?

3. Who were the United Mine Workers? How strong was their union in West Virginia? What specific labor battles did they fight?
4. Why do you think some people were willing to become strike breakers?
5. How is corporate hiring of strike breakers yet another example of the divide-and-conquer strategy used by those in power?
6. How do you think the white reading public reacted to the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*?
7. Why are many of the authors in this chapter so disdainful of “reformers”?
8. Do you think it is more possible today for “a man to be both a Negro and an American” than it was at the turn of the twentieth century?
9. How do you think the authors of these entries would describe a truly free society?
10. Do textile workers, or any other organized groups of workers, ever “rise in armed revolt against their oppressors” as the mill workers in Lawrence predicted?
11. Do you think striking is justified? If so, under what conditions? If not, why not? Should doctors, police, or fire fighters be allowed to strike? Why, or why not?
12. How do you think federal, state, and local governments justified their responses to strikes?

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 13 in both books. For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

13. Emma Goldman wrote about the Spanish-American War that, “the lives, blood, and money of the American people were used to protect the interests of the American capitalists.” How do the voices in chapters 12 and 13 echo her sentiments?

14. What do you think attracted people like Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and Helen Keller to socialism?
15. Who were the “muckrakers” of the early twentieth century? Who are the muckrakers of the twenty-first century?
16. What led to the panic and financial collapse of 1907? How did the crisis contribute to the social, political, and economic unrest of the early twentieth century?
17. Why do you think that a memorial parade in which 100,000 people marched was held for the victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, while there was little media coverage and far less interest in the victims of the Ludlow Massacre, which occurred two years later?
18. How do you feel about the fact that in the early twenty-first century, forty-four families made \$1 million a year—a sum equal to the total income of 100,000 families who each made \$500 a year?
19. Why were African Americans kept out of the trade-union movement for so long? How might their membership have strengthened the unions?
20. What made the IWW different from other unions?
21. What does Howard Zinn mean when he writes that “there was almost a religious fervor” (*People’s History*, p. 340) to the Socialist movement?
22. What role did African Americans play in the founding and leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People? What were the early goals of the naacp, and who were some of its early leaders?
23. What is a trust buster? According to Howard Zinn, was Theodore Roosevelt really a trust buster?

Evaluation Tools

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end prod-

uct should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. Find out more about the United Mine Workers. What were the goals and activities of their union in West Virginia? What specific labor battles did they fight? What were their accomplishments? How are the labor grievances of miners different from and the same as the labor grievances of other workers throughout the United States in the early twentieth century? Compare and contrast the labor conditions of these miners with those of the twenty-first century.
2. Read *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friederich Engels. What are their specific grievances against capitalism and capitalists? How do they propose that socialism will cure these evils? Does this more in-depth discussion of socialism help you to better understand why it was so attractive to many workers in the early twentieth century? How and why?
3. Read *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. Why do you think this classic novel is a century old but still resonates with many American readers? What do you believe to be the three primary themes that Sinclair wants you to understand about Jurgis's story? Do you agree or disagree with them? Explain. When you are finished, read "The Chain Never Stops" by Eric Schlosser, published in *Mother Jones* magazine. (See <http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2001/07/meatpacking.html>) How does this article about workers in the meatpacking industry at the end of the twentieth century compare and contrast with the experiences faced by Jurgis and his family almost a hundred years earlier?
4. Go to the website for *Mother Jones* magazine at <http://www.mojones.com/>. Read the most recent issue and then determine why the journal is named after Mother Jones. What is your overall impression of the articles? Who do you think would subscribe to this journal? Would you subscribe? Why, or why not?
5. Learn as much as possible about the Ludlow Massacre. What were the initial grievances of the workers at Ludlow? Locate several newspaper articles that reported the event. Were they supportive of the strikers, strikebreakers, and/or the federal government's response? How and why? Do you think

Woodie Guthrie's lyrics accurately portrayed the event? Why do you think it was thirty-three years before the Ludlow Massacre was memorialized by Guthrie's song? Why would he write this song in 1946?

6. Find a recording of "Ludlow Massacre." Then locate recordings and lyrics of other songs written between the late 1940s and the 1960s about union organization that occurred during the early twentieth century. What do they have in common? Which do you think most accurately portrayed the events? How successful were these recordings? Why do you think folk singers and writers of the mid-twentieth century were attracted to this early-twentieth century movement?
7. Find out more about the labor organizer Joe Hill. What was his background, and how did it influence his decision to join the IWW? Locate some of his songs. Read the lyrics and listen to any recordings. How do his songs reflect his experiences as a labor organizer? What was the nature of the crime for which he was indicted and found guilty? Learn as much about the trial as possible. Do you think he received a fair trial? Do you think Hill became a martyr to the labor movement? How and why?
8. In 1925, Alfred Hayes wrote the lyrics for what later became the famous song—set to music by Earl Robinson—"Joe Hill." Over the next several decades, Paul Robeson performed, popularized, and recorded this song repeatedly. In the 1960s, such well-known folk performers as Pete Seeger and Joan Baez further popularized the song. Read the lyrics for all six verses, then listen to several different renditions of the song. Which do you think is most powerful and why? Do you think Hayes's purpose in writing the song was to make a labor-union hero out of Hill? Did the song accomplish this? Explain. Do you think this song would resonate with American workers in the early twenty-first century? Explain.
9. Pick one of the early twentieth-century muckrakers for a biographical sketch. Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, Jacob Riis, Upton Sinclair are all possibilities. Learn more about their backgrounds and what led them to print what they witnessed. How did their muckraking efforts lead to reform? What opposition did they face?
10. Howard Zinn describes the existence of sweatshops at the turn of the century. Learn as much as possible about sweatshops in one urban area between 1900 and 1920. How did they operate? Who was involved with sweatshop

labor? Were sweatshop workers involved in unions? Who benefited from sweatshop labor? What were working conditions like for sweatshop laborers? Then learn about contemporary sweatshops that operate in America today. Compare and contrast sweatshop conditions in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century with conditions at the turn of the twenty-first century.

11. Learn more about the Wobblies—the IWW. How did it arise and gain momentum in the United States? What were its goals and accomplishments? Where, regionally were its efforts most or least successful? Explain. To whom did the Wobblies appeal?
12. Find out more about Emma Goldman. How did her background contribute to her decision to become a political activist devoted to overthrowing capitalism? Why did the government consider her to be a dangerous woman? Do you think she was dangerous? Explain. Would the government today think she was dangerous? How and why?

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. In Mother Jones’s speech, she states that “a contented workman is no good.” Using examples from your reading, explain how this statement illustrates the ongoing struggle between corporation owners and labor.
2. Provide examples from the reading to support Du Bois’s statement that “the problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” Has the problem been solved in the twenty-first century? Explain.
3. Many of the voices in this chapter discuss their quest for freedom. How are their concepts of freedom similar? Which have more realistic expectations for achieving freedom? Which have more unrealistic expectations? Explain. How do their definitions of freedom compare and contrast with your own?
4. In her 1908 speech, Emma Goldman predicted that as America became the “most powerful nation on earth,” it would “eventually plant her iron foot on the necks of all other nations.” What did she mean? Using examples from the reading, explain how her prediction did or did not come true.
5. The striking mill workers in Lawrence wrote in 1912 that “as useful members of society and as wealth producers we have the right to lead decent

and honorable lives.” How and why would others whom you have read about during this period have supported this statement? How do you think they would describe such a “decent and honorable” life? Do you think that everyone has such a right? Why, or why not? What role, if any, should the government play in helping people to lead such a life?

6. Almost a hundred years ago, Margaret Sanger wrote, “No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body.” How do you suppose this sentiment was accepted at the turn of the century? How is this very same sentiment used in the twenty-first-century context?
7. Howard Zinn argues that the Progressive period did not usher in real reform because “fundamental conditions did not change . . . for the vast majority of tenant farmers, factory workers, slum dwellers, miners, farm laborers, working men and women, black and white” (*People’s History*, p. 349–350). Support or refute this statement with ample examples from your reading.
8. Using examples from the reading, how and why were African Americans excluded from involvement in the socialist and union movements in the early twentieth century? How were they included?
9. Using examples from the readings, explain how and why Socialism was so attractive to some workers in the early twentieth century. Why do you think Socialism failed to attract a larger following among the working and middle classes? Why do you think that almost a hundred years later, Socialism and Socialists have less influence than they had at this time?
10. Many of the people whose voices you have read in this/these chapter(s) were considered dangerous to the public good in the early twentieth century. Which do you think were believed to be most dangerous, and why? Do you think they posed a real danger to the nation? Do you think the real or perceived danger they posed justified placing any limits on civil liberties?

SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES

1. Write a one-person play about a union organizer, antiwar activist, or feminist who was involved in a social movement at the turn of the century. Some of your dialog should originate with the actual speeches and essays of the activist. Perform this play for an audience of your choice.

2. Imagine you are a contemporary muckraker who has been hired to write an article for the next issue of *Mother Jones*—a magazine founded in 1976 as an independent, nonprofit publication committed to social justice. Select a contemporary labor issue to investigate and be sure your research includes a comparison with labor conditions that existed at the turn of the twentieth century. Then write your article. To learn more about *Mother Jones*, refer to its online journal at <http://www.mojones.com/index.html>.
3. Conduct a survey among young adults in which you will ask two questions: How would you define patriotism? What thoughts or actions would you consider unpatriotic? Make a list of all the characteristics the answers have in common and another list for singular characteristics. Using these various definitions, create the following: your own definition of patriotism in the twenty-first century and a list of actions considered to be unpatriotic in contemporary society. Then write a short children's book in which you compare and contrast these definitions and perceptions of patriotism in the early twenty-first century with ideas about patriotism in the early twentieth century.
4. Write a poem or compose a song that memorializes one of the persons involved in or events that were part of the resistance movements at the turn of the twentieth century.
5. Stage a town meeting as you imagine it would have been held in an industrial town in the early twentieth century. Invite at least three persons whom you learned about in your reading. Each will give a 3–5 minute speech about his or her commitment to and involvement in Socialism and the beliefs about how Socialism can help United States workers. Invite three other persons from corporate management who will refute their claims. Community members (the remaining students in the class) will ask questions of the speakers.