

The Remedial Herstory Project

INQUIRY-BASED LESSON PLAN

STAGING THE INQUIRY

For this inquiry, teachers should consider opening with an intriguing and open ended question, then provide some background on this topic generally in the form of a video, brief lecture, or presentation. Close the introduction by asking students what questions they have, guide them in discussion to the question for the inquiry, highlighted at the top of the next page.

ACTIVITY TASKS

- Pose a broad open ended question. Provide background information.
- Students respond to questions in this packet independently or with a partner.
- Consider doing one of the following to extend the exercise:
 - Facilitate student discussion of the compelling question.
 - Facilitate a 4-corner debate.
 - Facilitate a structured academic controversy.
 - Students assume the characters involved and discuss the compelling question in character.
- Students craft an argument.

C3 FRAMEWORK

D1.1.9-12. Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.

D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

D2.His.11.9-12. Critique

the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

Inquiry Activity: What role should the government play in the relationship between the owners and the Triangle workers?

In this inquiry, students will examine the larger question of government protections for employees in the context of two major debates over the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. The first debate is the role that socialism played in the success of the garment worker strike. The second debate is over whether the government should hold the factory owners responsible for manslaughter, when over 140 employees burned in a factory fire.

Students should read the Historical Context below, then examine the documents in each of the inquiries.

Historical Context:

The Triangle Waist Company was in many ways a typical sweated factory in the heart of Manhattan, at 23-29 Washington Place, at the northern corner of Washington Square East. Low wages, excessively long hours, and unsanitary and dangerous working conditions were the hallmarks of sweatshops.

Even though many workers toiled under one roof in the Asch building, owned by Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, the owners subcontracted much work to individuals who hired the hands and pocketed a portion of the profits. Subcontractors could pay the workers whatever rates they wanted, often extremely low. The owners supposedly never knew the rates paid to the workers, nor did they know exactly how many workers were employed at their factory at any given point. Such a system led to exploitation...

The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union organized workers in the women's clothing trade. Many of the garment workers before 1911 were unorganized, partly because they were young immigrant women intimidated by the alien surroundings. Others were more daring, though. All were ripe for action against the poor working conditions. In 1909, an incident at the Triangle Factory sparked a spontaneous walkout of its 400 employees. The Women's Trade Union League, a progressive association of middle class white women, helped the young women workers picket and fence off thugs and police provocation. At a historic meeting at Cooper Union, thousands of garment workers from all over the city followed young Clara Lemlich's call for a general strike.

With the cloakmakers' strike of 1910, a historic agreement was reached, that established a grievance system in the garment industry. Unfortunately for the workers, though, many shops were still in the hands of unscrupulous owners, who disregarded basic workers' rights and imposed unsafe working conditions on their employees...

Near closing time on Saturday afternoon, March 25, 1911, a fire broke out on the top floors of the Asch Building in the Triangle Waist Company. Within minutes, the quiet spring afternoon erupted into madness, a terrifying moment in time, disrupting forever the lives of young workers. By the time the fire was over, 146 of the 500 employees had died.

*Kheel Center, Cornell University. "SWEATSHOPS & STRIKES BEFORE 1911." Remembering The 1911 Triangle Factory Fire. Last modified February 13, 2014.
<https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/sweatshopsStrikes.html>.*

Inquiry Activity: How did socialist philosophy impact the garment worker strike?

Examine the documents below. Consider the source of the information. How does each characterize the strike? What role does socialism play in the success of the strike?

Document A: Clara Lemlich

First let me tell you something about the way we work and what we are paid. 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. 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 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.

Lemlich Clara. New York Evening Journal. November 28, 1909. Cited in Leon Stein, ed., Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy. Quadrangle/New Times Book Company New York, 1977.

Questions:

1. *When was this document written in relation to the fire?*
2. *What qualifies her to speak about the Triangle factory?*
3. *What were the conditions like in the factory?*
4. *Does it surprise you that these conditions were known before the fire?*

Document B: Anne Morgan

Miss Anne Morgan, daughter of J. Pierpont Morgan, is a recent applicant for membership in the Women's Trade Union League, and when her name has been passed upon she will become a regular member, paying \$1 a year, which is the fee. This is the league to which the striking shirtwaist makers belong, and the application for membership means that Miss Morgan is interested in the attempt these girls are making for their own betterment. In joining the league she gives her moral support...

"I have only known something of this strike for a short time," said Miss Morgan to a Times reporter last night, "and I find other people to whose attention it has not been brought do not know anything about it. If we come to fully recognize these conditions, we can't live our own lives without doing something to help them, bringing them at least the support of public opinion.

"We can see from the general trade conditions how difficult it must be for these girls to get along. Of course, the consumer must be protected, but when you hear of a woman who presses forty dozen skirts for \$8 a week something must be very wrong. And fifty-two hours a week seems little enough to ask.

"Rose Schneiderman told me of a woman who had worked in a box shop in Chicago for thirty years and could not in ten hours a day make enough to live on-she could only do it by working twelve to fourteen hours. Those conditions are terrible, and the girls must be helped to organize and to keep up their organizations, and if public opinion is on their side they will be able to do it."

"Miss Morgan Aids Girl Waiststrikers." *New York Times*. Last modified December 14, 1909. Retrieved from <http://www.nzdl.org/cgi-bin/library.cgi?e=d-00000-00---off-0whist--00-0---0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-1l--11-en-50---20-about---00-0-1-00-0-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&f=1&c=whist&cl=CL1.12&d=HASH01c92089164d1c22bdfb6012>.

Questions:

1. *Who is Anne Morgan?*
2. *What qualifies her to speak about the Triangle factory?*
3. *What were the conditions like in the factory?*
4. *Does it surprise you that a woman in her position would support the workers?*

Document C: Eva McDonald Valesh Fires First Gun in Fight

The opening gun in Miss Anne Morgan's campaign for a new trade union movement was fired yesterday morning by Mrs. Eva McDonald Valesh who, in a speech before the Women's Forum, at No. 23 West 44th street, said the socialists were using strikers for their own "dangerous purposes." The speaker charged that the Woman's Trade Union League was "full of socialism, marked by its perfunctory interest for the strikers."

"Do you want to go on record as saying that?" demanded a woman in the audience.

"I do, and I'll write it down if you like," said Mrs. Valesh.

The speaker began by criticising the executive committee of the shirtwaist strikers for turning down an offer which, she said, was made through her informally by the Associated Waist and Dress Manufacturers.

"It was made informally, but I was assured that the organization would stand by it if the strikers agreed," she went on. "The manufacturers proposed to submit the differences to a committee to be composed of either Samuel Gompers, John Mitchell or any labor leader they might name, a representative of the manufacturers, and a third man to be designated by the other two. The strikers committee refused to consider any overture but one agreeing to the closed shop.

"What is that strikers' committee? Eighteen men and two girls were present the day I saw them--the men all socialists, connected with the trade perhaps, but ignorant of what the girls want. And to show you the feminine view point, those girl strikers are actually grateful to the men who are using them for their own purposes. It's so nice of the men, who know so much more than we, to serve on our committees, they say.

"I propose," Mrs. Valesh went on, "to start a campaign against socialism. This strike may be used to pave the way for forming clean, sensible labor unions, and I want to enroll every woman of leisure, every clubwoman, in the movement. The existing unions aren't doing what they ought to stem the tide of socialism this country. The Woman's Trade Union League is dominated by socialism, though I won't deny they have helped the shirtwaist strikers some.

"Socialism is a menace... There's nothing constructive about socialism. It just makes those ignorant foreigners discontented, sets them against the government, makes them want to tear down. And socialists are using the strikers."

"How about the suffragists?" demanded Mrs. William H. McCartney.

"That's different," said Mrs. Valesh. "The suffragists have used the strikers, but they've helped them, given them spiritual vision, and, besides, the suffragists say frankly to the strikers, 'We want votes for women, while the socialists veil their purposes under all sorts of pretences...'

Miss Morgan's name was not mentioned during the meeting, but Mrs. Valesh said afterward that she might be considered as representing Miss Morgan.

"New Trade Union: Eva McDonald Valesh Fires First Gun In Fight." New York Daily Tribune. Last modified January 22, 1910, p. 9. Retrieved from <http://www.nzdl.org/cgi-bin/library.cgi?e=d-00000-00---off-0whist--00-0----0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-11-11-en-50---20-about---00-0-1-00-0-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&f=1&c=whist&cl=CL1.12&d=HASH01c92089164d1c22bdfb6012>.

Document D: Diary of a Factory Worker

When I got to the League Mary[A] asked me to attend a conference. I was sure that we were going to get some money out of it and went. But it proved to be one of those fake affairs held by our supposed-to-be friend for the purpose of forming a new organization that would make it its business to drive the Socialists out of the union movement. If I hadn't felt so sad in general there was an opportunity for some good fun. It was to laugh the way those swell ladies were worrying about the welfare of us working girls.

"Why, they've been completely neglected by us," pleaded Eve[B], the temptress. "And the horrid Socialists lost no opportunity to enlighten them about the principles of Socialism. What will become of us if this is permitted to go on? We must at once start some systematic work in order to educate the girls out of Socialism." I guess she'll have a hard job.

Big strong Ann, who's got more money that she can count, sat there and continually nodded her head in approval of what Eve had to say. I would just love to make her roll up her sleeves and do an honest day's work, like us girls have to do all the time. I'll bet you ten to one that our union wouldn't seem too radical to her then. "Labor conditions are too serious a matter," said one of the painted ladies. "Especially now," she added. "When living costs so much the Socialists are liable to light a terrible fire of revolt." I honestly wish they would.

"Those Socialists are dangerous," chimed in another, who has been changing her charitable occupations and husbands more frequently than some people do their clothes, and was therefore considered an authority on both subjects. "Their principles go to bring about the disruption of the home," continued the worthy matron.

I felt just like telling them that our homes can no longer be disrupted, for the most of us working people have no homes, but my opinion wasn't asked and I kept mum. I've gone through too much to care for their jabbering; it's only that they're trying their best to make trouble. I wouldn't be at all surprised if they'd be glad to see the League go to the dogs, but not on your life—we've too many good fighters in there.

Malkiel, Theresa S. "The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker." *Co-operative Press: New York, 1910, 172-74.* <http://www.nzdl.org/cgi-bin/library.cgi?e=d-00000-00---off-0whist--00-0---0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-1l--11-en-50---20-about---00-0-1-00-0-0-11-1-0utfZz-8-00&a=d&f=1&c=whist&cl=CL1.12&d=HASH01c92089164d1c22bdfb6012>.

Analysis: How did socialism impact the success of the garment worker strike?

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Inquiry Activity: Were Harris and Blanck guilty of manslaughter?

Examine the documents below. Consider the source of the information. How does each characterize the fire? Who do they blame for it?

Document A: Stories of Survivors in the *New York Times*

Cecilia Walker, 20 years old, who lives at 29 Stanton Street, slid down the cable at the Washington Place elevator and escaped with burned hands and body bruises. She was on the eighth floor of the building when the fire started. Running over to the elevator shaft she rang for the car, but it did not come. As she passed the sixth floor sliding on the cable she became unconscious, she said, and does not know what happened until she reached St. Vincent's Hospital, where she is now.

"A girl and I," she told the doctors at the hospital, "were on the eighth floor, and when I ran for the elevator shaft my girl friend started for the window on the Washington Street side. I looked around to call her but she had gone."

Jump Before Firemen Arrive

According to several eye witnesses, the flames were pouring from the windows and the girls jumping to the sidewalk for several minutes before the first fire truck with ladders arrived. Benjamin Levy of 995 Freeman Street, the Bronx, one of the first men to arrive at the burning building, says that it was all of ten minutes after the fire started before the first fire engine arrived. Mr. Levy is the junior member of the firm of I. Levy & Son wholesale clothing manufactures just around the corner, at 3 and 5 Waverley Place.

"I was upstairs in our work-room," said he, "when one of the employes who happened to be looking out of the window cried that there was a fire around the corner. I rushed downstairs, and when I reached the sidewalk the girls were already jumping from the windows. None of them moved after they struck the sidewalk. Several men ran up with a net which they got somewhere, and I seized one side of it to help them hold it.

"It was about ten feet square and we managed to catch about fifteen girls. I don't believe we saved over one or two however. The fall was so great that they bounced to the sidewalk after striking the net. Bodies were falling all around us, and two or three of the men with me were knocked down. The girls just leaped wildly out of the windows and turned over and over before reaching the sidewalk.

"I only saw one man jump. All the rest were girls. They stood on the windowsills tearing their hair out in the handfuls and then they jumped.

"One girl held back after all the rest and clung to the window casing until the flames from the window below crept up to her and set her clothing on fire. Then she jumped far over the net and was killed instantly, like all the rest."

One for the policemen who were checking up the bodies as they were being shipped to the Morgue told of one heap in which a girl was found still alive when the others were taken off her. She died before an ambulance doctor could reach her.

Elevator Made One Trip.

Samuel Levine, a machine operator on the ninth floor, who lives at 1,982 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, told this story when he had recovered from his injuries at the New York Hospital: "I was at work when I heard the shout of 'Fire!' The girls on the floor dropped everything and rushed wildly around, some in the direction of windows and others toward the elevator door. I saw the elevator go down past our floor once. It was

crowded to the limit and no one could have got on. It did not stop. Not another trip was made.

"There were flames all around in no time. Three girls, I think from the floor below, came rushing past me. Their clothes were on fire. I grabbed the fire pails and tried to pour the water on them, but they did not stop. They ran screaming toward the windows. I knew there was no hope there, so I stayed where I was, hoping that the elevator would come up again.

"I finally smashed open the doors to the elevator. I guess I must have done it with my hands. I reached out and grabbed the cables, wrapped my legs around them, and started to slide down. I can remember getting to the sixth floor. While on my way down, as slow as I could let myself drop, the bodies of six girls went falling past me. One of them struck me and I fell to the top of the elevator. I fell on the dead body of a girl. My back hit the beam that runs across the top of the car.

"Finally I heard the firemen cutting their way into the elevator shaft, and they came and let us out. I think others were taken out alive with me."

M. Samilson of the firm of Samilson & Co., on the second floor of the building, was standing at one of the windows of his office just after the fire was discovered. In the next few minutes, he said, he saw several bodies shoot past the window from above, most of the girls. When the firemen reached him at nearly 6 o'clock, he was still standing there horrified. He says he could not tear himself away.

Few of the girls that fell from the windows on the ninth floor, it was learned, jumped of their own accord. They were pushed forward by the panicstricken crowd in the room behind them.

One of the bookkeepers, Morris Lewine, said he was on the top floor. He threw the books with the exception of a ledger into a safe when the cry of fire was raised. He then made his way to the roof, followed by two girls. He found a ladder and made his way with one of the girls to the roof of an adjoining building. He did not know what became of the second girl.

Thomas Gregory, an elevator man, who works at 103 Bleecker Street, said he was going home when he came to the fire. He says he ran into the building and made three trips in the elevator, taking down about fifteen persons at each trip. He said he left the hallways of the upper floors crowded with frenzied men and women, who fought to get into the elevator and clawed his face and neck. After the third trip the machinery broke down, he said. He said there were two elevators when he went into the building. One was on the ground floor, and one was on one of the upper floors. He saw no operator.

"Stories of Survivors. And Witnesses and Rescuers Outside Tell What They Saw." New York Times. Last modified March 26, 1911, p. 4. Retrieved from https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/newspapersMagazines/nyt_032611_2.html.

Questions for Analysis:

1. *Based on this document, was anyone at fault for the fire or the rescue effort?*
2. *What quote from the document shows that?*

Document B: Samuel Gompers

The laws for the protection of the workingman are not fully enforced until such disasters occur. Dr. Chas.P. Neill, United States Commissioner of Labor, speaking of the necessity for legal compensation for death or injury by accidents, said: This is the only country in the world where an appeal for help has to be made following an industrial disaster. All countries where there is industrial advancement such as we enjoy have the necessary machinery to provide for the victims without an appeal to charity. The fund of \$30,000 raised for the relatives of the recent factory fire in New York, while it does credit to the charitable inclination of the citizens of New York, is an indictment of the maladjustment of our social system."

Too long, in dealing with the trade unions, has there been an assumption by employers, wholly unfounded, that their class represents law and order, responsibility, and high standing, the distinction of individual merit and the authority of superior class integrity. Too often what they really stand for is no more than a colossal and unblushing gall, unscrupulous and insatiable greed.

Samuel Gompers "Hostile Employers See Yourselves as Others Know You." American Federationist. Last modified May, 1911. p. 356-361. Retrieved from https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/newspapersMagazines/af_0511.html.

Questions for Analysis:

1. *Based on this document, was anyone at fault for the fire or the rescue effort?*
2. *What quote from the document shows that?*

Document C: "Great American Trials"

The trial took over three weeks, and 155 witnesses testified. one of the most gripping descriptions of what had happened came from Kate Alterman, a Triangle employee who survived the fire. First, she described how, amidst the chaos, she saw one Margaret Schwartz die in the flames because no one could open the Washington Place stairway door:

I saw Bernstein, the manager's brother, trying to open the door but he couldn't. He left; and Margaret was there, too, and she tried to open the door and she could not. I pushed her on a side. I tried to open the door, and I couldn't.... And then she [Margaret] screamed at the top of her voice, "Open the door! Fire! I am lost, there is fire!"

Horried, Alterman watched the fire consume Schwartz. Alterman then described how she survived a mad dash through the fire raging through the Greene Street stairway:

And then I turned my coat on the wrong side and put it on my head with the fur to my face, the lining on the outside, and I got hold of a bunch of dresses and covered the top of my head. I just got ready to go and somebody came and began to chase me back, pulling my dress back, and I kicked her with my foot and she disappeared.

I tried to make my escape. I had a pocketbook with me, and that pocketbook began to burn. I pressed it to my heart to extinguish the fire, and I made my escape right through the flames: the whole door was a flame right to the roof.

Once she was on the roof, firemen eventually rescued Alterman. Despite Alterman's dramatic testimony and that of other witnesses, however, the trial turned upon the question of whether Blanck and Harris knew that the Washington Place door was locked. Judge Crain read his instructions to the jury on this point:

You must be satisfied from the evidence, among other things, before you can find these defendants guilty of the crime of manslaughter in its first degree not merely that the door was locked, if it was locked, but that it was locked during the period mentioned under circumstances bringing knowledge of that fact to these defendants.

But it is not sufficient that the evidence should establish that the door was locked, if it was locked, during such a period; nor yet that the defendants knew that it was locked during such a period, if it was locked ... Was the door locked? If so, was it locked under circumstances importing knowledge on the part of these defendants that it was locked? If so, and Margaret Schwartz died because she was unable to pass through, would she have lived if the door had not been locked and she had obtained access to the Washington Place stairs and had either remained in the stairwell or gone down to the street or another floor?

"Triangle Shirtwaist Fire Trial: 1911 ." *Great American Trials. Encyclopedia.com. Last modified October 16, 2020. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/law/law-magazines/triangle-shirtwaist-fire-trial-1911>.*

Questions for Analysis:

1. *Based on this document, was anyone at fault for the fire or the rescue effort?*
2. *What quote from the document shows that?*

Document Set D: Closing Statements of Attorneys in Trial

Prosecution Protecting the Victims

Gentlemen, you recall the testimony of Katie Rabinowitz, or Mrs. Gartman, because she was one of the last witnesses to testify. You remember how she told you that he saw Margaret Schwartz fall up against the partition; you remember how she accounted for every step at the time of the fire on the ninth floor; you remember how she

testified how that door was tried and there was no chance to get out, it was locked. I do not believe that any juryman sitting in that box will forget as long as he lives the story of Kate Alterman of the tragic last moments of Margaret Schwartz. A truer story never was told than that. You remember they had been friends, Mrs. Gartman, Margaret Schwartz, the deceased in the indictment, and Kate Alterman had been friends. You remember how she called her Kate, and she then called back Margaret, and there was no sound that came after that. She died at that ninth floor door and they were passing out of the eighth floor then and these were the conditions between the eighth and the ninth floor, (pointing to the handrail exhibits).

Yes, Brown opened that door on the eighth floor and there /were no dead bodies there, but there were on the ninth. The stairs were not burned while the doors were up, and the rails proved it, the pictures prove it, the sill, the stiles, the case proves it, and the lock itself proves it, besides all the human testimony that there is in this case.

Gentlemen, believe this testimony (pointing to the handrail exhibit) , believe the testimony of these honest little girls that were here, and that told their stories from their hearts, believe them, as you must, and one of the most awful and greatest crimes of history has been proven and is now to be punished in this Court. The testimony of those honest children is before you and you cannot get away from it in this case, and then these things (indicating the handrail exhibits) have brought no lawsuits. These things have no bias. Here are the photographs, here are the rails, here are the sills, there is the casing, the material that they were working with, the pocketbook from Blanck, the lock, that lock shot, and that bolt there, that held them back – these are the mute witnesses that are speaking to you, and that tell you that every single item of this crime has been proven to mathematical demonstration.

Yes, in the words of the defendants' counsel, 1911 has been a bitter year for the poor families from whom these dear ones have been taken by the neglect of these defendants. Margaret Schwartz died, Margaret died at the Washington place door on the ninth floor because that door was locked and that bolt held that door. Safety and all was on the other side for her and the others, and this safety was kept from her. Why? To prevent these defendants, who had five hundred people under their keeping -- their lives - from the paltry expense of a watchman.

I have done my duty. The People now look to you to do yours. God grant that you will.

Defense of Harris and Blanck

Well Gentlemen, you of course are expected to recall all of this evidence. To my mind it is a human impossibility. When it comes to one of these long trials, with every confidence in the Jury system there ought to be some better way than there is of preserving the testimony. To my mind I think it would be a splendid idea if the Jury were furnished with transcripts of the testimony from day to day because then they might keep it green in their recollection; but whatever may be the deficiency of a human effort, I think as the testimony went along you gathered sufficient of it so that you may pass upon these two questions:

- Beyond a reasonable doubt, did the People prove that Harris and Blanck killed Margaret Schwartz through the negligent way they conducted their business?

- Beyond a reasonable doubt did the People prove not only that that door was locked, because that is of no consequence, did they prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Margaret Schwartz died because that door was locked? Did they prove that that door was locked. Did they prove anything against these defendants?

Gentlemen of the Jury 1911 is drawing to a close. 1911 was a bitter year for these two men. Thirty years ago were these men in a shop not equipped with electric lights, and electric power, with stairs made of wood and which we climbed together, I labored in one of those shops. The progress that has been made in that is wonderful. I admire the confidence that has been reposed in me by them to present this case to you. Never, never in all my life, and never again in the balance of it I hope will there be such a responsibility resting on me. I took their case; since the day they were indicted I have slept with it and I have pondered with it and labored with it. I do hope, I really hope that I have brought to you the conviction of their innocence.

"TRANSCRIPTS OF CRIMINAL TRIAL AGAINST TRIANGLE OWNERS." Last modified November 1, 1911. <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/triangletrans/18>.

Questions for Analysis:

1. *Based on this document, was anyone at fault for the fire or the rescue effort?*

2. *What quote from the document shows that?*

Document E: Smithsonian Magazine

The trial was high drama with counsel for the defense Max Steuer discrediting Kate Alterman, a key witness and survivor of the fire, by convincing the jury that she had been coached and memorized her tale. After three weeks of trial with more than 100 witness testimonies the two men ultimately beat the rap on a technicality – that they did not know a second exit door on the ninth floor was locked – and were acquitted by a jury of their peers. Although the justice system let the families of the workers down, widespread moral outrage increased demands for government regulation....

The media at the time attributed the cause of the fire to the owners' negligence and indifference because it fit the crowd-pleasing narrative of good and evil, plus a straight-forward telling of the source of the fire worked better than a parsing of the many different bad choices happening in concert. Newspapers mostly focused on the factory's flaws, including poorly maintained equipment. Court testimony attributed the source of the blaze to a fabric scrap bin, which led to a fire that spread explosively – fed by all the lightweight cotton fabric (and material dust) in the factory.

Like many other garment shops, Triangle had experienced fires previously that were quickly extinguished with water from pre-filled buckets that hung on the walls. Blanck and Harris dealt with fire hazards to their equipment and inventory by buying insurance, and the building itself was considered fireproof (and survived the fire

without structural damage). Workplace safety, however, was not a priority for the owners. Workman's compensation was non-existent at the time. Ironically the nascent workmen's compensation law passed in 1909 was declared unconstitutional on March 24, 1911 – the day before the Triangle fire...

The Triangle factory fire gave rise to progressive reformers call for greater regulation and helped change attitudes of New York's Democratic political machine, Tammany Hall. The politicians woke up to the needs, and increasing power, of Jewish and Italian working-class immigrants. Affluent reformers such as Frances Perkins, Alva Vanderbilt Belmont and Anne Morgan also pushed for change. While politicians still looked out for the interests of the moneyed elite, the stage was being set for the rise of labor unions and the coming of the New Deal. The outrage of Triangle fueled a widespread movement.

*Liebhold, Peter. "Why the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Makes for a Complicated History." Smithsonian Magazine. Last modified December 21, 2018.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/triangle-shirtwaist-factory-fire-makes-complicated-history-180971019/>.*

Questions for Analysis:

1. *Based on this document, was anyone at fault for the fire or the rescue effort?*

2. *What quote from the document shows that?*

Document F: "147 Dead, Nobody Guilty" Literary Digest

Nine months ago 147 persons, chiefly young women and girls, were killed by a fire in the factory of the Triangle Waist Company at Washington Place and Greene Street, of New York. All of the subsequent evidence, as well as the facts of the tragedy, convinced that New York papers that this factory where hundreds of girls were compelled by circumstances to work for their livings was a veritable fire-trap, though not worse, perhaps, than hundreds of buildings in the city. Last week, Issac Harris and Max Blanck, owners of the Triangle Company, under trial for manslaughter in the first or second degree, were acquitted by a New York jury on their third ballot, after being out an hour and forty-five minutes. While the press in the main seem inclined to accept the verdict itself without serious challenge, many papers are gravely troubled over its practical implication that no one is responsible for that wholesale slaughter, and the feeling is widely exprest that, whatever the explanation of the outcome, justice has in fact been balked. It is "one of the disheartening failures of justice which are all too common in this country," declares the New York Tribune, which goes to say:

The point of view of those who must day after day submit themselves to risks similar to those which obtained in the Triangle factory in thus voiced by the New York Call (Socialist):

There are no guilty. There are only the dead, and the authorities will forget the case as speedily as possible.

Capital can commit no crime when it is in pursuit of profits.

Of course, it is well known that those who were killed in the Triangle disaster are only part, and a small part, of those murdered in industry during the passing year. There are only 147 incinerated and mangled. But there were thousands of others who met a similarly agonizing fate during this year of 1911.

The whole capitalist system is based upon such unspeakable systematic murder, and those who defend the capitalist system defend those murders.

Perhaps the men on the jury had no thought of condoning murder, but that is what they did. They freed of the punishment legal guilt might bring two men who profited by the conditions that made such a disaster inevitable. They did it because they recognized the basic fact that their own interests were involved in such an action. They stood by their fellow manufacturers and set them free.

Questions for Analysis:

1. *Based on this document, was anyone at fault for the fire or the rescue effort?*

2. *What quote from the document shows that?*

Analysis: Were Harris and Blanck guilty of manslaughter? Use evidence from the documents to defend your answer.

