

Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited

Child Labor and the Leo Frank Case

Overview:

The purpose of this lesson is to learn about the history of child labor in America, the reasons for its spread throughout the industrialized sections of the country, the conditions in which children often worked and the changes in America's laws, which created protections for children. This lesson will relate the history of child labor in America to the Leo Frank Case.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Define child labor
- Define compulsory schooling
- Draw conclusions about attitudes towards child labor in Georgia at the turn of the century
- Evaluate how these attitudes contributed to the furor in the Leo Frank Case
- Examine abuses of child labor today

Resources and Materials:

Historical overview of child labor in America

Photograph of child laborers in cotton mills in Mississippi, 1911

Website: <http://www.hrw.org/children/labor.htm>

Website: http://www.unicef.org/why/why_rights.html

Activities:

1. School attendance in Georgia did not become compulsory until 1916, three years after the murder of Mary Phagan. Laws enacted at that time required children ages 6 to 16 to attend school.

- When was Mary Phagan murdered?
- How did lack of compulsory school attendance at the time of the Leo Frank Case have an effect on the type of workers employed by the National Pencil Company?

2. At the time of the Leo Frank Case, Georgia did not require school attendance although other states had already enacted laws regarding compulsory school attendance.

- How did the antebellum agricultural economy of the South play a role in delaying Georgia's adoption of these laws?
- How did the slow industrialization of the South and the collapse of the price of cotton contribute to the growth of the child labor force in Georgia?
- Why did some Georgia families send their young daughters to work?

- How might Georgia parents have felt about sending their daughters to work?
- Towards whom might they have directed these feelings? Why?

3. Create an editorial cartoon in which you condemn the abuses of child labor.

4. Write an editorial in which you give reasons for extending compulsory schooling in Georgia to the age of 16.

5. Research the use and abuse of child labor today using the following website: <http://www.hrw.org/children/labor.htm> Write a report in which you give examples of types of child labor found in the world today.

6. In conclusion, read about the foundation principles of the universal rights of children from the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

http://www.unicef.org/why/why_rights.html List and explain the fundamental rights of children as identified in this document.

Historical Overview of Child Labor

The Industrial Revolution produced many changes in American life. Where work done by hand had been the norm, now machines manufactured the same goods more quickly and cheaply. Factories were built to mass produce these items. Workers did not need specialized skills or significant strength to operate the machines in these factories. A child labor force could do the same work as adults, for less pay. By the middle of the 19th century, child labor was commonplace in the industrialized cities of America.

Before the growth of factories, children in America had toiled on farms with their families. As rural families moved to the cities, children from these poor families now found work in factories. The working conditions there were particularly terrible. Many children, some as young as 7 or 8, worked for 12 to 18 hours per day, six days per week. Pay was meager. Factories were often dark, dirty and dangerous. The long hours made it impossible for working children to attend school.

Child labor in the United States continued throughout the 19th century. Some efforts were made to outlaw child labor. In 1813, Connecticut passed a law requiring working children to have some schooling. By the close of the 19th century, in 1899, 28 states had passed laws to regulate child labor. Georgia was not one of those states. In 1910, less than one half of white school age children in Atlanta were enrolled in the city's public schools.

In an effort to regulate child labor in America, Congress passed laws in 1918 and 1922. Both laws were struck down by the Supreme Court, which ruled both laws unconstitutional. Finally the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed in 1938. This law set a minimum age for 16 for workers employed during regular school hours and 14 for some after school jobs. Workers had to be at least 18 to be employed in certain jobs considered dangerous. These protections still apply to most American children but do not apply to children of non-citizens or to children in other countries. There are still cases of abuses of child labor in the world today.



Force working in West Point (Miss.) Cotton Mills, May, 1911: Lewis Wickes Hine, 1874-1940, photographer. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. 20540