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Justifying Unions, Homestead 1892 and Starbucks 2022  
American Studies  
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## **1. Introduction, Overview, Rationale**

Union membership as a proportion of the worker population has declined steadily since the 1970s, but recently union movements have emerged in industries that were traditionally non-union, including retail and service industries. Workers at Starbucks, Amazon, Trader Joe's and HarperCollins have begun efforts to form unions. This lesson will encourage students to think about the extent to which arguments for unions in the Gilded Age are evident in contemporary movements, and will allow students to consider the ways the changing economic realities necessitate changing rhetorical tactics.

Do the ways unions organized and justified their claims continue to resonate in the nascent movements of contemporary America? What can organizers of today learn from the workers at Homestead? And what arguments from the 19th century are no longer effective? Which struggles of the nineteenth century continue today and how can workers effectively argue for their rights?

Through popular songs written in response to the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892 and in defense of worker's rights, students will explore the ways workers in the late 19th century argued for unions. These claims challenged many of the traditional relationships between citizenship and property and the songs can illuminate the ways the workers framed and understood their relationships to capital and to each other (Krause 336-42). They will then explore one or more contemporary union drives and compare the rhetorical strategies and economic critiques workers today make to those made by workers in the Homestead Steel Strike.

## **2. Lesson Goals**

- Students will analyze and evaluate rhetorical strategies made by industrial workers in the late 19th century
- Students will compare historical rhetoric to contemporary arguments made by union organizers today.
- Students will use historical arguments (where appropriate) to create a contemporary union campaign, either by writing a song or by creating an infographic.

## **3. Connection to State Standards**

Grades 11/12 ELA NC Standards:

RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language.

RL.11-12.9 Analyze how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics and compare the approaches the authors take.

#### 4. Detailed description of Lesson

##### **Preparation and Context:**

Prior to class, students will read article, “The Strike of Homestead Mill” from the PBS American Experience Series, Andrew Carnegie, the Richest Man in the World,

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/carnegie-strike-homestead-mill/>

##### **The Class:**

After a brief review of the events and consequences of the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892, students will listen to and analyze the rhetoric of popular songs and verse from the time period. Students will divide into small groups and each group will focus on one or two songs or poems. As they read, they will tease out the arguments for unions and workers made in each piece.

Each group will report to the full class, noting both the arguments made and the textual evidence that made those arguments. The class will then, together, generate a catalog of the pro-worker rhetoric made in these documents.

Nineteenth century songs and documents:

“Storm the Fort, Ye Knights of Labor” 1882, Beeswax Taylor

“Stand By the Workmen at Homestead” Stephe Bonbright, Copyrighted July 15, 1892

“A Fight for Home and Honor” John Kelly, July 16, 1892

“Amalgamate as One” Billy Jenkins, 1894, collected 1947

##### Questions for students to consider and discuss:

- What are workers arguing in these documents?
- What rights do they claim?
- How do they describe their relationship to the means of production and the owners of capital?
- What do they want?
- How might the companies respond to their claims?

Once students have collected and considered the rhetoric of the workers in the nineteenth century, they will investigate contemporary arguments for unions in our post-industrial society,

which will encourage students to consider the continuities and the departures from industrial organization in the nineteenth century. In this case, students will look at Starbucks, Amazon, and HarperCollins, though these could easily change depending on the status of these and other union efforts.

Questions to consider as students research contemporary union movements:

- What are the goals of the organizers?
- Who is involved in organizing? How do they frame their arguments?
- What are the key differences in terms of the types of jobs current workers have compared to steelworkers in the nineteenth century?
- What are the key similarities?
- Do you think they'll succeed? Why? Why not?
- How have the relationships between employers and employees changed (if they have changed) since the 1890s?

Once students have had an opportunity to discuss contemporary labor organizing efforts, they will work either alone or with a partner to write a labor song for one of the contemporary efforts that highlights the arguments and justifications for labor organization today. This will be the formal assessment for this lesson.

**5. Formal and informal assessment**

**Informal assessment:** students will generate lists of arguments and cite specific text to support those claims about arguments.

**Formal assessment:** students will write their own union song for one of more contemporary union movements incorporating relevant pro-union historical arguments and/or contemporary arguments made by those working to unionize contemporary workplaces.

**6. Technology needs**

Students will need either photocopied or digital access to the texts, audio player to listen to the songs, the cutting edge technology of the pencil and paper, and perhaps access to a whiteboard or blackboard (and chalk!)

**7. Material needed to complete the unit**

Students will need access to the texts and access to some sort of writing implement and writing surface (probably a computer will suffice here)

**8. Other sources to consider**

Depending on current events, different union drives might be more salient. During the summer of 2022, Amazon, Starbucks, HarperCollins, Trader Joe's have all been highlighted by the *New York Times*.

Amazon: <https://bamazonunion.org/whyunion>

Starbucks: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/17/briefing/union-drives-college-graduates.html>

HarperCollins: [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/books/harpercollins-strike.html?campaign\\_id=9&emc=edit\\_nn\\_20220723&instance\\_id=67460&nl=the-morning&regi\\_id=92504375&segment\\_id=99383&te=1&user\\_id=098e798231a29ee80d5b4f7f13e835e5](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/books/harpercollins-strike.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20220723&instance_id=67460&nl=the-morning&regi_id=92504375&segment_id=99383&te=1&user_id=098e798231a29ee80d5b4f7f13e835e5)

Trader Joe's: [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/business/trader-joes-union.html?campaign\\_id=9&emc=edit\\_nn\\_20220729&instance\\_id=67913&nl=the-morning&regi\\_id=92504375&segment\\_id=99874&te=1&user\\_id=098e798231a29ee80d5b4f7f13e835e5](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/business/trader-joes-union.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20220729&instance_id=67913&nl=the-morning&regi_id=92504375&segment_id=99874&te=1&user_id=098e798231a29ee80d5b4f7f13e835e5)

## **Storm the Fort, Ye Knights of Labor**

Beeswax Taylor, 1882 (qtd in Krause 262-3)

Toiling millions now are waking,  
See them marching on,  
And the tyrants now are shaking  
Ere their power is gone.

Chorus

Storm the fort, ye Knights of Labor,  
God defend our cause;  
Equal rights for self and neighbor,  
Down with unjust laws.

'Tis labor that sustains the nation,  
And 'tis just and fair  
That all should help, whate'er their station,  
To produce their share.

But now the drones steal all the honey,  
From industry's hives;  
Banks control the nation's money,  
And control our lives.

In time of war the workmen rally  
At their country's call'

From the hilltops and the valley  
Come they one and all.

In time of peace the loom and anvil,  
Reaper, plow and spade.  
Join their chorus with the mandril;  
Each man at his trade.

Do not load the workman's shoulder  
With an unjust debt;  
Do not let the rich bondholder  
Live by blood and sweat.

The land and air by God was given,  
And they should be free,  
For our title came from heaven—  
Not by man's decree.

Why should those who fought for freedom  
Go in bonded chains?  
Workingmen no longer need them  
When they use their brains.

## “Stand by the Workmen at Homestead”

Stephe S. Bonbright, copyrighted July 15, 1892 (qtd in Haines)

1. There are watchers who weep where the hearths dimly burn,  
Where many a loved one is missing tonight;  
Where capital's ruling what man's labor should earn,  
With law of its own against reason and right:  
The Iron King's stronghold with detectives to taunt,  
With gunboats, and armor and rifles for fight,  
In vain with their bluster did they working men daunt,  
But in conflict surrender'd at Homestead that night  
Dull strokes of the hammer on the anvil are heard,  
Where the toll of the factory bell brings word:

Chorus:

For working men to gather,  
From hillside and from heather,  
And all prove true, both old and new,  
That they will stand together;  
Their rights must not be garnished,  
And homes must be tarnished,  
But rich or poor alike endure,  
And stand by those at Homestead.

2. Yes, the hills and the valleys responded and fought,

In union the strength of the working men lay;  
The Iron King's invaders are scattered to naught,  
For Gold's first defeat was at Homestead that day:  
The loved ones who fell in the terrible strife,  
And the chairs made vacant in the workingmen's homes,  
Their death will extol their hon'orable life,  
And names be honored where'er workmen roam  
Dull strokes of the hammer on the anvil are heard,  
Where the toll of the factory bell brings word:

3. Cannot intrenchment by capitalists cease,  
And labor be given the station it due?  
Let loosen the fetters and manhood release,  
Then old days of peace and goodwill shall renew:  
The farmer whose bins are ladened with grain,  
Must not sell to those who gamble in flour;  
And toil of mechanics and workmen's vain,  
When they're in jeopardy from hour, to hour.  
Dull strokes of the hammer on the anvil are heard,  
Where the toll of the factory bell brings word.

## **A Fight For Home and Honor**

John Kelly, July 16, 1892 (qtd in Haines)

We are asking one another as we pass the time of day  
Why working men resort to arms to get their proper pay,  
And why our labor unions they must not be recognized,  
While the actions of a syndicate must not be criticized.  
Now the troubles down at Homestead were brought about this way  
When a grasping corporation had the audacity to say:  
"You must all renounce your union and forswear your liberty,  
And we'll give you a chance to live and die in slavery."

### **Chorus:**

Now the man that fights for honor, none can blame him.  
May luck attend wherever he may roam.  
And no son of his will ever live to shame him.  
Whilst Liberty and Honor rule our Home.

Now this sturdy band of working men started out at the break of day  
Determination in their faces which plainly meant to say:  
"No one can come and take our homes for which we have toiled so long  
No one can come and take our places no, here's where we belong!"

A woman with a rifle saw her husband in the crowd,  
She handed him the weapon and they cheered her long and loud.  
He kissed her and said, "Mary, you go home till we're through."  
She answered, "No. If you must die, my place is here with you."

### **Chorus**

When a lot of tramp detectives came without authority  
Like thieves at night when decent men were sleeping peacefully  
Can you wonder why all honest hearts with indignation burn,  
And why the slimy worm that treads the earth when trod upon will turn?

When they locked out men at Homestead so they were face to face  
With a lot of bum detectives and they knew it was their place  
To protect their homes and families, and this was neatly done  
And the public will reward them for the victories they won.

## **Amalgamate as One**

Billy Jenkins, 1894, collected 1947 (qtd in Haines)

Labor unions should all be united  
And prove to the world they are one  
They could get decent pay without trouble  
Let us show now that it can be done  
We are slaves to a few in this country  
That is crushing us down it is true;  
But there's one thing I'll ask you to think of  
My advice you will never rue.

### **Chorus:**

Always help your brother  
Whenever he's in need.  
Extend your hand with welcome  
Wherever you will meet.  
Don't sneer at him in poverty,  
Help him if you can,  
Remember he's your brother –  
An Amalgamated man.  
Always treat union men as you find them,  
Where'er in this world you may roam,  
And if ever you meet a true brother,  
Do not turn him away from your home;  
Remember he may have been cast out  
Through fighting for Honor and Right;  
And compelled to leave home in starvation,  
With no place of shelter at night.

### **Chorus**

If we part, let us hope not forever,  
But my plea is the same to the end.  
Have courage to help one another  
In pledges we took to defend.  
Trades unions should all band together  
And I hope that the day will soon come  
That we shall not be so divided  
Amalgamate now all as one.

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