Nell Nelson and *The Chicago Times* "City slave girls" series

Beginning a national crusade for labor reform in the late 1800s

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to illustrate the instrumental role of reporter Nell Nelson in beginning a national labor reform movement resulting in improved working conditions for women and children in the USA.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on archival newspaper clippings, original scrapbooks kept by prominent Chicago figures of the time, US census records, and other labor history resources, the paper synthesizes heretofore-disparate sources to provide a more complete picture of the cause-and-effect nature of Nelson's *Chicago Times* "City slave girls" series.

Findings – The research concludes that Nelson was an instrumental force in the formation of over ten advocacy organizations that worked to transform the way women and children in the USA were treated in the workplace and was instrumental in securing legislative reforms.

Originality/value – This is the first paper to explore the role played by Nell Nelson in securing labor reforms, thus, contributing to a more complete understanding of management history.

Keywords Child labour, Labour reform, United States of America, Newspapers, Modern history, Labour market, Social reform

Paper type Research paper

Nell Nelson: the newspaper exposé

The story of Nell Nelson (aka Helen Cusach Carvalho) might best be begun with a review of the autobiography of Charles Chapin, the famed New York newspaper editor sentenced to serve a 20-year-to-life term in Sing Sing Prison after murdering his wife of 38 years. The "rose man", a nickname Chapin acquired for the rose garden he cultivated on the prison grounds, wrote his autobiography while in prison. Chapin (1920, pp. 127-32) states that James J. West, then owner of The *Chicago Times,* hired him on Saturday, January 7, 1888, as the city editor. Tasked with rejuvenating the once thriving paper, Chapin (1920, p. 133) wrote that two weeks into his tenure he hired a "young school-teacher who had considerable talent as a writer" and instructed her to begin responding to help wanted advertisements. More specifically, this reporter (who he never identifies by name) was directed to seek employment in sweatshops and factories and report back on the conditions under which girls were forced to work. Her experiences were then chronicled under the headline "City Slave Girls" (Chapin, 1920, p. 133).

A review of archived copies of The *Chicago Times* reveals that almost six months elapsed between when Chapin hired this reporter and when her first article was published on July 30, 1888. The series, authored by undercover reporter Nell Nelson

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(see Appendix 1), began with a front page promotional advertisement on July 29, 1888 (see Figure 1), and ran almost daily through September 3, 1888, under the heading "City Slave Girls". Each day, Nelson wrote of her endeavors seeking and obtaining employment all across Chicago, describing in detail the working conditions and treatment to which she was subjected. Donning the "rags of poverty" (Nelson, 1888b, p. 14), Nelson successfully secured employment at over 15 Chicago establishments, investigating and interviewing staff at nearly three times that many. Two important clarifications are needed with regard to the previous. First, employment has been

The Chicago Times

Let Romance Rest.

Give Truth a Hearing.

Life Among the Slave Girls of Chicago

NO need to draw upon the imagination nor to indulge in fiction. A dreadful, damnable reality is presented to this community. European methods introduced, developing and expanding here, whereby the marrow is ground out of the bones, the virtue out of the souls, and the souls out of the bodies of the miserable, ill-fed, half-starved, underpaid, insulted, roughly-treated, and unprotected Working Girls.

Shocking Revelations

Resulting from an investigation put on foot by

The Chicago Times

Not a batch of sensational stories, in which names are fictitious and addresses are suppressed, but a series of articles which point to the men who are growing rich at the expense of human life and blood. *The Real Names and Addresses* of Chicago manufacturers who have established a slave trade; who have transformed honest labor into a bondage; who are practicing the arts of the Pharaohs upon the weak and defenseless women of the city; who are running

Organized Hells on Earth.

Places where virtue counts for nothing; where girlhood and womanhood are degraded; where moral and physical rottenness abound; where an ulcer is festering that will eat a hole through society. The entire sickening story will be told in this paper *without regard to persons or places.*

The First Installment Will Appear Tomorrow

THE WHOLE STORY Beginning Tomorrow in *The Times* and running every day until finished.

And the articles will be published daily until the whole truth is made known to the public.

THE WHOLE STORY Beginning Tomorrow in *The Times* and running every day until finished.

The Grinding Process

The Grinding Process.

Figure 1.
Microform Duplicate of the Front Page of *The Chicago Times* on July 29, 1888

defined here as an exchange of services for monetary compensation without regard to the length of tenure at any given establishment, a distinction necessary given that some of Nelson's recounts were based on very short periods of employ or probationary by which no compensation was received. Second, Nelson's series of "City Slave Girls" articles was also published in book form by Barkley Publishing Company in 1888. Given that the book is available electronically though the US National Archives and is significantly more legible and accessible than the microform of the original articles, page numbers from the book are cited throughout the manuscript for ease of reference.

For her time, Nelson's approach to uncovering a story was innovative, as investigative (or undercover) journalism was not yet a common industry practice. Avid readers of the tales of Sherlock Holmes, as well as those familiar with the history of investigative journalism, may be familiar with Nelson's name. To these individuals, Nelson would be described as the rival, sidekick, colleague, or partner of ace reporter Nellie Bly. Bly, known as the pioneer of investigative journalism, is also well recognized for her fictional role in the Sherlock Holmes stories, her tenure as the CEO of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company (where she invented the 55 gallon oil drum), and the Nellie Bly Amusement Park in Brooklyn (themed after Bly's enactment of Jules Vern's *Around the World in Eighty Days*). Though Nelson, arguably the first pioneer of the practice, to some extent is slighted by Bly's fame, some solace can be taken from Bly's reputation being retrospectively criticized for sensationalism.

The majority of Nelson's undercover investigations focused primarily on Chicago's clothing manufacturing industry. In modern terms, many of the businesses Nelson investigated would be termed "sweatshops", and were a reality for working women and children 120 years ago in most major US cities (Katz and Katz, 1975, pp. 3-32). Nelson's quests for employment required much legwork, as she often had to solicit multiple businesses to secure employment. After being turned away at two feather factories and three corset shops, her first success came when she was hired at a lace manufacturing company on State Street. While waiting in the lobby to speak with a manager, foreman, or owner, Nelson quietly observed the interactions of others. She wrote of a young girl by the name of Martha Rhafferty who came into the office to drop off her work and pick up her pay (employees were like contractors, as they would pick up raw materials, take them home to sew, and return with the completed product). Nelson observed Rhafferty politely explain to the manager that her mother did not wish her to continue working and that this would be her last batch of lace returned. The manager, seemingly unhappy with this news, forced her to sit and wait, claiming "Mr White" was not in and she could not be paid. Martha took a seat and Nelson moved in, seizing the chance for an interview (Nelson, 1888b, pp. 5-7).

During the informal interview, Rhafferty showed Nelson her contract with the company. In the contract, the firm had agreed to refund one of the three dollars deposited on the completion of 15 dollars worth of work. The general work arrangement (as Nelson came to find out first hand and in writing from the company) was that the employees pay $3.00 up front to secure work. The first $2.00 was non-refundable and covered the cost of training (i.e. providing some patterns). The last $1.00 was a deposit for raw materials entrusted to the employee and would only be returned on completion of $15.00 work. This arrangement was unfair at best, as the $3.00 initial cost was quite steep just for the privilege of potential work (there was no guarantee of work from week to week). Rhafferty explained that she was required to

pay the $2.00 training cost despite already knowing how to sew. Nelson was told the same, but recognized that girls who did not know how to sew would not have been hired. Rhafferty was compensated $0.60 per dozen mats sewn, which took her a week to do. Thus, for her to break even on the initial $3.00 expense, five weeks' work was required, and to recoup the additional $1.00 deposit required 25 weeks' work.

The previous recount was typical of both Nelson's investigative approach and of her experiences across dozens of employers. A clear pattern emerged of forcing employees to wait extended periods of time for both pay already earned and for the opportunity to even get some work. Some employers would demand employees arrive at 7.00 a.m. and keep them waiting until 10.00 a.m. to determine whether work would be available, knowing that by 10.00 a.m. one would be unable to secure work elsewhere that day. Other employers would only pay employees every couple of weeks, which at this time was an undue hardship. Most employers required employees to provide their own tools (e.g. scissors, p. 53), and even some raw material (see, needles and thread, p. 13). One employer went so far as to try and search Nelson on her exit to ensure she had not stolen any "scraps" (p. 43), another to charge employees weekly for iced water on their breaks (p. 17). Some employers would fine (i.e. garnish the wage of) employees for talking (p. 39), being late to work (p. 20), or eating (p. 40). Verbal abuse was commonplace (e.g. p. 42). The use of child labor was a common practice. Nelson identified one shop where the oldest girl was only 15 years of age (p. 48), another employing girls aged 12 (p. 61), 13 (p. 59) and 14 (p. 101). The use (or abuse) of teen boys was also common, and Nelson wrote of meeting or interviewing "young boys" (p. 110), "teen boys" (p. 59), and specifically a boy of 13 years of age (p. 101). Some minor provisions did exist against the use of child labor, but as Nelson uncovered, even if enforced by an employer, that did not stop parents from lying about their children's ages so they could work (pp. 134-5).

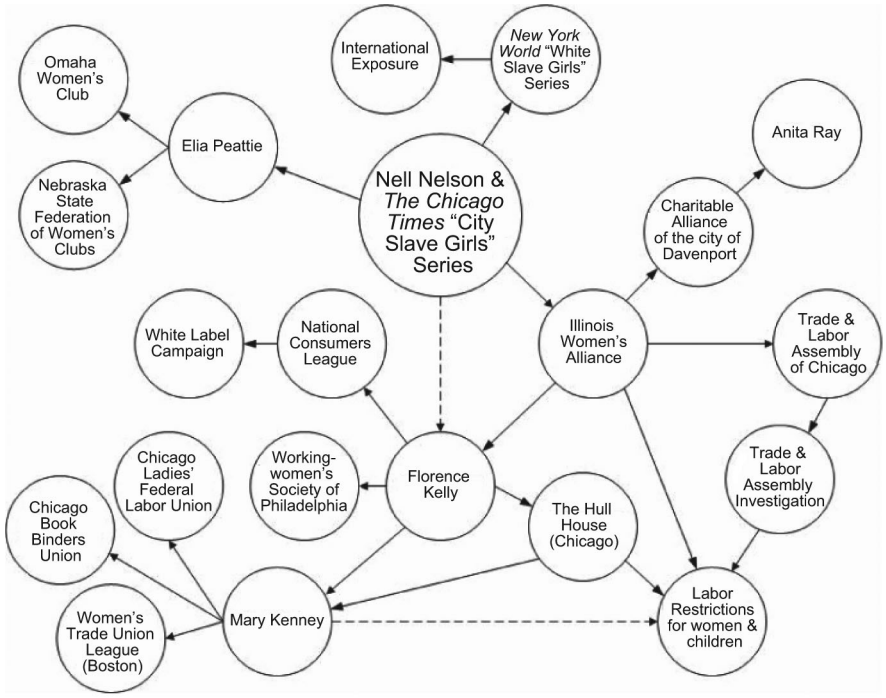
As time progressed and word of Nelson's articles spread, employers became increasingly skeptical of individuals soliciting work. As would be expected from newspaper backlash, gossip circulated around the clothing industry of the brown-haired, brown-eyed, undercover investigative reporter, forcing Nelson to begin to disguise herself. Yet, despite her best efforts (and in one instance dressing as a man), one savvy forewoman asked her, "Aren't you from *The Times*? You might be "Nell Nelson" disguised in pants for all I know" (Nelson, 1888b, p. 102). This difficulty likely explains why she almost immediately shifted her exploits and focused on Chicago's famed Packingtown area. Worth noting is her infiltration of the packing-house owned by Philip Danforth Armour, she wrote, "It is certainly very good of Mr Armour to build Sunday-schools, educate struggling artists, buy pictures, and patronize music, but these young women are human, if their senses are dulled to the sickening smells of the slaughtering establishment, and a clean sitting room with neat walls and chairs in which to rest at noon and clean towels for the 6 o'clock toilet, would not be wasted charity" (Nelson, 1888b, p. 112). It was Armour's Packingtown facilities that later became the basis of Upton Sinclair's famous fictional work *The Jungle*.

The exposé aftermath

Nelson's work struck a nerve with the public, evoking both outrage and dismay, and attracting much attention to Nelson's work. Chapin (1920, p. 133) noted, "the circulation

of the paper increased so rapidly that the presses were overtaxed" and that Nelson was so "elated with her success" she relocated to New York to replicate the series of articles. In a foreword to the book *The White Slave Girls of Chicago*, dated September 30, 1888, Nelson states the articles were written with both "a feeling of interest and a sense of responsibility greater than ordinarily follows obedience to a newspaper assignment". What Nelson could have only hoped for, but could not have known at the time, was the extent to which her exposé would serve as a call to action. This manuscript traces Nelson's work as being instrumental in the formation of over ten social advocacy organizations spanning seven states, which worked to transform the way both women and children were treated in the workplace. Figure 2 visually illustrates both the direct and indirect connections to Nelson and The *Chicago Times* "City Slave Girls" series.

To date, the scalability of social organizations has been scarcely studied (Hill *et al.*, 2010; Bornstein, 2004), and little research has sought to identify the drivers of the organizing process behind social organizing efforts. As explained in more detail going forward, Nell Nelson used the power of the media to spread the word of the sweating conditions women and children were being exposed to, thus resulting in public outrage and collective social action. Accordingly, Nell Nelson can serve as an example of a prominent female figure in management history, helping to fill the gender gap noted by Phillips and Rippin (2010).



Note: Solid lines (—) represent direct links. Dashed lines (---) represent indirect links. Appendix D contains reference information for each of the above links

Figure 2.
Visual Depiction of Nell Nelson's Influence

Exposé aftermath in Illinois

The Illinois Woman's Alliance. The first and most influential of the organizations formed as a direct result of Neslon's exposé series was the Illinois Woman's Alliance (IWA; Foner, 1955, pp. 190-1; Scharnau, 1973). Records from the Ladies' Federal Labor Union (LFLU) meeting held on August 18, 1888, indicate little else other than Nelson's articles were discussed (Morgan Collection; a microform copy of scrapbooks kept by Elizabeth Morgan, an individual instrumental in founding the Illinois Woman's Alliance and chair of the IWA's Child Labor Committee). The members of the LFLU decided it was time for action and called a meeting inviting virtually every woman and civic organization in Chicago. The meeting was held on October 6, 1888, at the Palmer House (a now historic hotel located at the corner of State and Monroe Streets in downtown Chicago), and was attended by delegates of 26 organizations. It was on this day as a result of discussions at this meeting that the IWA was formed. Appendix 2 (see Figure A2) contains a brief summary of the IWA organizational meeting as well as its Articles of Organization (The Morgan Collection).

Best illustrated by the prominent display on the IWA's letterhead are their taglines: "Justice to Children" and "Loyalty to Women" (see Figure 3). To the IWA, these were causes they were passionate about, passion that arose out of the knowledge brought to them by Nell Nelson and The *Chicago Times* (The Woman's Alliance, 1889). Elizabeth Morgan, one of the original LFLU members involved in the formation of the IWA and Chair of the IWA Child Labor Committee (Scharnau, 1973) said, "Until the *Times* took up the cause of the working girls, not a hand was raised in their defense" (The Morgan Collection). Corinne Brown, another LFLU member who became head of the IWA's education committee agreed with Morgan, noting, "We are in a position to know and the exposure of these truths touches us" (The Morgan Collection). The focused efforts of the IWA were categorized by Tax (1980, p. 69) into four main areas,

(1) A campaign against sweatshops.

(2) A campaign to protect children (focused on both legislation against child labor and passing a compulsory education bill).

Figure 3.
Illinois Woman's Alliance Letterhead

Note: Image acquired from public records located in the Illinois State Archives

(3) The placement of public baths in Chicago's working-class districts.

(4) A drive for inspections of state institutions (e.g. Asylums, police courts) because they felt women were being abused.

To accomplish these objectives, the IWA lobbied extensively. Its initial and arguably most successful campaign began almost immediately on the organization's formation in 1888. It consisted of a lobbying effort for compulsory education legislation, a tactic the IWA viewed as the most effective way to address the child labor controversy. It had estimated there to be 50,000 children between the ages of seven and 14 that were either employed in sweatshops or wandering the streets of Chicago (The Morgan Collection). On December 10, 1888, the IWA petitioned the Chicago Common Council (CCC) to enact compulsory education legislation (Letter from the Chicago Trade, 1888), and in early 1889, the IWA sponsored a compulsory education bill before the state legislature providing for a 12 to 24 week school year for children between the ages of seven and 14 (Scharnau, 1973; The Morgan Collection). The compulsory education bill was passed in May 1889 and despite some loopholes allowing for legal exemption with parental consent, the IWA viewed this as a substantial victory (Tax, 1980, p. 76). As such, they began lobbying for enforcement of the bill. On April 16, 1890, the IWA wrote the following to the Mayor and Common Council of Chicago ("Letter from the Illinois Women's Labor Alliance to the Mayor and Common Council of Chicago", April 16, 1890):

> Gentlemen:
>
> To help our sanitary police in their work of enforcing Section 1357 of the Health Ordinances relating to child labor, we urge your body to enact an ordinance to the following effect.
>
> That no child shall be employed for hire without furnishing a certificate signed jointly by the Board of Education and the Health Department. Such certificate comprising of: an affidavit of the parent or guardian of the child giving its age, place and date of birth; a certificate of the city physician certifying that the child is in proper physical condition to work; and a certificate of the Board of Education, certifying that the child has complied with the compulsory education law, during the 12 months next preceding the time of application for employment.
>
> That such certificate or certified copy certificate thereof shall be kept on file in all places where children are employed and be subject to inspection by the sanitary officers.
>
> Very respectfully
> The Illinois Woman's Alliance
> Julius Goldzier
> 22 Wd

Despite success on compulsory education, the issue of women and child sweatshops had yet to be resolved. To address this, the IWA felt that non-partisan factory inspectors were necessary, as the ethics and allegiance of the few current inspectors was suspect. In May, 1889, the IWA (with the support of the Chicago Trade & Labor Assembly) petitioned the Mayor and CCC seeking both fie additional inspection badges and that equal numbers of men and women be appointed as inspectors (Chicago Tribune, 1889). When its petition went unanswered, the IWA escalated its effort by storming a CCC sub-committee meeting and ultimately were granted its request. Despite this victory, the Mayor was in no hurry to appoint inspectors and by October

had only made one appointment (Tax, 1980, p. 78). It was around this time that the initiative to rid Chicago of sweatshop conditions began to gain external support, as two key organizations joined in the quest: the Chicago Trade & Labor Assembly and the Hull House.

Chicago Trade & Labor Assembly (CTLA). The CTLA was arguably one of the most supportive and involved IWA member organizations. On December 16, 1888, it wrote a letter to the CCC in support of the IWA's compulsory education initiative ("Letter from the Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly to the Chairman and members of the School Committee of the Chicago Common Council", December 16, 1888; a copy is included in Appendix 3, see Figures A3 and A4). Likewise, in May, 1889, the CTLA jointly supported the IWA's request to the Mayor and Chicago Common Council for additional inspection badges so that more inspectors could be out monitoring working conditions (Chicago Tribune, 1889; Tax, 1980, p. 78). Building on the momentum started by the IWA, in August, 1891, the CTLA launched an investigation into the sweatshop conditions present in garment factories. A three-person team consisting of Elizabeth Morgan, an officer from the city Health Department, and the city attorney were accompanied by a group of reporters and sketch artists, and set out to invade local shops and interview workers (Scharnau, 1973). The results of their visits to over 30 sweatshops were published in a widely distributed (over 10,000 copies) pamphlet titled, "The New Slavery: Investigation into the Sweating System" (The Morgan Collection, Scharnau, 1973; Foner, 1955, p. 191). This 24-page pamphlet "clearly disproved clothing manufacturers' denials of a sweating system in Chicago", noting that women accounted for nearly half of the labor force and the employment of children under 14 years of age was common (Scharnau, 1973, p. 345). This work amplified the public demand for change that had resulted from Nelson's exposé, even capturing the attention of a Congressional sub-committee tasked with investigating the sweating system (Foner, 1955, pp. 191-2).

The Hull House. The Hull House (HH) was a settlement house located in the Nineteenth Ward of Chicago at the corner of Halsted and Polk Streets. Founded by (now) Nobel Laureate and famed pioneer of social work Jane Addams, the Hull House name carried much political clout (as evidenced by Addam's successful nomination of Theodore Roosevelt for President of the USA), and focused on achieving social reform (Berson, 2000; Tax, 1980, p. 135). The need for labor reform in Illinois was first noticed at the HH's inaugural Christmas celebration, when a number of young girls were offered candy but declined, saying that they "worked in a candy factory and could not bear the sight of it" (Addams, 1910, p. 198). On further HH investigation, it was discovered that these girls had worked 14 hours per day for the past six weeks. This Christmas story was enlightening to the HH, and prompted HH resident Florence Kelly (whose background and tie to Nelson will be discussed anon) to petition the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics to launch an investigation into local working conditions (Addams, 1910, pp. 198-9).

Kelly's request, coupled with the concurrent public outcry resulting from both Nelson's exposé and the CLTA pamphlet, generated the necessary social pressure on the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics to launch such an investigation. In May 1892, Kelly was appointed as a special agent of the IL Bureau to investigate child labor and the sweatshop system in Chicago (Addams, 1910, p. 200-1; Silverberg, 1998, p. 135, The Morgan Collection). In conducting her investigation, Kelly began generating detailed

maps of Chicago's Nineteenth Ward. The maps evoked the physical dimensions of the social problems, as well as their spatial scale, and illustrated the realities of the conditions more concretely and convincingly than text descriptions and statistical charts (Silverberg, 1998, p. 137).

A synthesis in Chicago. As a result of public pressure from Nelson's exposé, the CTLA investigation and pamphlet, and the Hull House investigation and maps, the Chicago labor movement took a leap forward when a three-part bill was proposed to the state legislature. It addressed:

(1) Lacking sanitary ordinances.

(2) Better enforcement of current laws (specifically child labor, truancy, and compulsory education).

(3) An eight-hour workday for women (Tax, 1980, p. 83).

All three organizations (the IWA, CTLA, and HH) immediately began holding meetings to rally support for the bill (one of which was chaired by Mary Kenny O'Sullivan and boasted over 2,500 people), which was passed with little opposition (*Chicago Times*, 1888).

It has been widely accepted that Nelson's work was directly responsible for the formation of the Illinois Woman's Alliance (IWA, e.g. Silverberg, 1998; Tax, 1980; Wood, 2005), and is corroborated by the notes from the August 18, 1888, meeting of the Ladies' Federal Labor Union (LFLU; The Morgan Collection). Sadly, the IWA was a relatively short-lived organization, lasting only six years, and dissolving due to internal turmoil and political dispute (The Morgan Collection). Yet, as Tax (1980, p. 66) notes "During the six years of its existence, the Illinois Women's Alliance accomplished more in the way of practical reform and political education than many organizations that have lasted five times as long".

The national (and international) reach of Nelson's exposé

Nelson's work and the public outrage did not end with the *Chicago Times* "City Slave Girls" series, nor was its scope limited to the three previously mentioned organizations. Nelson had truly initiated a movement, one that others (e.g. Knights of Labor) had attempted before, but had never been able to gain enough momentum to affect real change. Nelson herself continued to work in New York, while colleagues of Nelson's likewise spread out geographically and continued the crusade. Others who knew only of the atrocities mentioned in Nelson's exposé also began lobbying for change, and one recount of Nelson's work was even reported in Mexico (De Pantoja, 1898).

The World Newspaper and New York City. Chapin (1920) noted in his autobiography that the "City Slave Girls" author (now known to have been Nell Nelson) relocated to New York to attempt to replicate her success, no doubt a result of the difficulty of continuing the crusade in Chicago given that her reputation now preceded her. Nelson's New York news career began with an article that ran on September 23, 1888, in *The World* newspaper under the heading "White Slave Girls". In it, using the lead "Poverty's Victims Chained to a Sewing Machine", she wrote of her infiltration of Schawb & Son's "New York Novelty Manufacturing Company" exposing "a filthy washroom" and "wages which mean that meat must be an occasional luxury". This article was subsequently cited and the story recounted in a book published in Spanish and distributed in South America (De Pantoja, 1898). De Pantoja portrayed

nineteenth-century working conditions and social life in the USA, and from the partial translation obtained, he did nothing more that recount the workplace conditions exposed in the article.

Unfortunately, New York's *The World* (like The *Chicago Times*) is only partially archived on microform, thus limiting the extent to which it can be searched. Despite a comprehensive search of the available microform archives 45 days before and after September 23, 1888, no additional articles authored by Nelson or published under the "White Slave Girls" heading were discovered. Lutes (2006, p. 31), however, wrote of a series of "white slave" articles authored by Nell Nelson in New York. Specifically, Lutes references three New York World articles dated November 18, 1888. November 25, 1888, and March 3, 1889 (2006, pp. 175-7) and credits authorship to Nelson. These three articles (from the brief recount offered by Lutes) appear to be where the term "slave girl" began to also take on a more sexual connotation, as this is the first time sex and a *quid pro quo* situation is mentioned in an article (suggesting that this was a prevalent occurrence in the workplace).

Florence Kelly. Florence Kelly, who earlier was credited as being instrumental in the success of the Hull House (HH), had a broader reaching effect both prior to and after her tenure at HH. A native of Philadelphia, Kelly first became attracted to the cause of the working women, and children, when she became aware of the atrocities exposed by Nelson and the subsequent work of the IWA (Tax, 1980, p. 81). In March, 1889, before her relocation to Chicago, Kelly began the Workingwomen's Society of Philadelphia. It was a small organization modeled after the IWA and focused on women's "self-protection, enlightenment, mutual aid and benefit, and for obtaining and enforcing legislation in the interest of the working class" (The Morgan Collection). Shortly thereafter, Kelly was forced to relocate to Chicago for child custody reasons, and, subsequently, joined Hull House (Tax, 1980, p. 81).

After her success at Hull House and tenure as a state factory inspector, Kelly relocated to New York where she was instrumental in the formation and development of the National Consumers' League (NCL; Evans, 1989, pp. 150-1). The NCL had two noteworthy accomplishments. First, they sponsored a "white label" campaign in which manufactures that conformed to NCL work standards were allowed to affix NCL labels to their product. This campaign offered a marketing advantage, as the public could elect to not purchase products made by non-compliant manufacturers. Second, the NCL also lobbied for both minimum wage and maximum hour legislation (Evans, 1989, p. 151; Weiner, 1985, p. 68) though little could be found on the success of its legislative efforts.

Elia Peattie. While working in Chicago (both prior to and during her tenure at The *Chicago Times*), Nelson became friends and, subsequently, a colleague of another Chicago-based reporter named Elia Peattie (Bloomfield, 2005, p. 172; Boehm, 2004, pp. 76-7). Though Peattie disagreed with some "scientific" child rearing advice posited by Nelson, they shared a common passion for the betterment of working conditions for women and children. Five years after Nelson left Chicago, Peattie relocated to Omaha, where, on May 10, 1893, she organized the first meeting of the Omaha Women's Club, a social reform organization that boasted over 400 members within the first six months (Boehm, 2004, pp. 195-7). The following year, Peattie took on the task of forming the Nebraska State Federation of Women's Clubs, representing clubs from eight cities and hosting the first state-wide conference (Boehm, 2004, pp. 198-201). Though it could be

argued that Peattie was more interested in the social aspect of the clubs, they did lobby for reform, form communities of women to be represented in the workplace, sought to provide better education, and an environment in which women could network.

Indirect links to Nelson

Thus far, Nelson has been directly linked to a variety of geographically dispersed organizations. Yet, the reach and impact Nelson's work had on society was likely much broader, inspiring dozens or even hundreds of individuals and organizations across the nation. One such indirect link can be found in examining the work of Mary Kenny O'Sullivan. As mentioned, O'Sullivan chaired one of the largest IWA/HH rallies in support of labor reform, and she also co-founded the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), organized both the Chicago Book Binder's Union and the Chicago Ladies' Federal Labor Union in the early 1890s, and in 1894 relocated to begin a WTUL chapter in Boston (Kessler-Harris, 1982, pp. 165-6). Given that O'Sullivan's participation in the Illinois Woman's Alliance (IWA) and Hull House (HH) rallies is well documented in The Morgan Collection and her work almost immediately follows Nelson's exposé series, plus her geographic alignment with Nelson, it is plausible to conclude Nelson's work likely influenced O'Sullivan.

The Charitable Alliance of the city of Davenport, Iowa, is another example of the indirect influences of Nelson's work. Provoked by a local newspaper article on prostitution and a culture of male predatory behavior toward young girls, fueled by a series of arrests as a result of the article, and inspired by the work of the IWA, Dr Jennie McCowen rallied community members together to form the Charitable Alliance (Wood, 2005, pp. 104-6). The alliance took on a broad social focus, seeking to provide assistance to the poor rather than exclusively focusing on women and children. The alliances initial success came when it lobbied for and established separate detention centers for women and girls, but later began to focus on liquor laws and forced prostitution of young girls in the city (Wood, 2005, p. 110). Anita Ray was a young Marshall Field's employee who left Chicago to pursue an acting career in Davenport. Ray took a job at a local music venue and almost immediately was forced into prostitution to survive. After four days' work, Ray quit her job and returned to Chicago where she was commissioned to write a newspaper story about the experience (Ray, 1903).

Like both the WTUL of Boston and the Charitable Alliance of Davenport, dozens of individuals and organizations evolved almost immediately post-Nelson, experiencing rapid growth and increased social support. The WTUL was expanded to St Louis, New York (where it organized the famed 1909 women's garment industry strike), and Philadelphia (where it organized and won a strike of Kalamazoo corset workers; Kessler-Harris, 1982, pp. 165-166). The formation of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) in 1890 almost immediately had over 60 member organizations, including the Charitable Alliance, Omaha Women's Club, Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs, and the IWA (Bloomfield, 2005; Boehm, 2004; Clinton, 1984; Wood, 2005). The Young Women's Christian Association began providing job-placement services to women (Clinton, 1984, p. 170), thus leveraging the bargaining power of the female workforce.

Impressive as is the known impact of Nelson's work, it cannot go without noting that much of her impact has yet to be explored. Little is known about the public

reaction to Nelson's 'White Slave Girls' series in *The World* newspaper. At the time, however, New York City was of comparable size to Chicago and if Lute's (2006) reference to Nelson's work holds true, Nelson's tenure in New York was much longer than Chicago. Nothing is known of what, if any, impact Nelson's work had on the impression of working conditions in America as perceived by South American readers of De Pantoja's book, but one must at least wonder what type of impression of work in America was left on the book's readers and what, if any, effect the impression had.

Discussion and conclusion

Given it is difficult to attribute specific organizations and successes directly to Nell Nelson (especially because it is likely she did not even have complete knowledge of either), it is still easy to recognize the influence Nelson's work had in affecting public outrage and subsequently beginning a movement toward improved working conditions for women and children. Nelson's work fuelled a process of organizing resulting in collective action. Aldrich (1999, p. 89) posited that "organizations are the dominant, taken for granted tools of collective action". Nelson's exposé series served as a symbolic experience to the community-at-large; the type of communal experience that Swidler (1986) argued fosters the creation of social moods, motivations, and ways of organizing that ultimately result in the forming of social bonds.

The creation of voluntary social movements by individuals looking to affect change is embedded in US culture (Aldrich, 1999). Women's groups of this time period (1890-1920), as argued by Clemens (1993), introduced models of organization into the political arena from the voluntary association sector. Aldrich (1999) noted that these social movements rested on prevailing cultural assumptions regarding the efficacy of voluntary action in American society. Termed "deep structure" by Drazin and Sandelands (1992, p. 236), these cultural assumptions were defined as "tacit rules that govern actors in their actions and interactions". Aldrich (1999) posited that, at least in Western industrial societies, these rules are socialized into individuals in such a way that they become part of their behavioral repertoire and are used as guides through most social situations. "Models of organization are part of the cultural tool kit of any society and serve expressive or communicative as well as instrumental functions" (Clemens, 1993, p. 771). Carroll and Harrison (1993) notes that individuals simply take these culturally defined rules for granted, thus resulting in the formation of new organizations as reproductions of existing organizational forms.

Over the past few decades the issue of sweatshops has again received much attention, though this time the geography has shifted. Charles Kernaghan of the US based National Labor Committee (NLC) has spent the last 30 years fighting sweating conditions around the globe. Kernaghan is the investigator responsible for exposing Kathie Lee Gifford's Wal-Mart clothing line was produced by Honduran children earning 31 cents per hour while working 75 hour workweeks (Greenhouse, 1996; Duke, 2005); as well as exposing similar conditions in facilities producing clothing for Gap, JC Penney, Nike, Target, Sean John, and many others. In true Nell Nelson fashion, Kernaghan has:

- posed as an investigator to gain access to plants;
- flown workers halfway around the world to appear on US television, speak at labor events, and provide Congressional testimony; and
- even used hidden cameras embedded on his body to document his findings (Duke, 2005).

Like Nelson, Kernaghan's work has effected social change through voluntary action. After Kernaghan flew a Salvadoran teenage worker from a Gap contracted plant to the U.S. to speak, the process of organizing began to occur and the pressure on Gap started to build. In an agreement signed December 15, 1995 between Gap and the NLC, Gap accepted "direct responsibility for how and under what conditions the products it sells are made", agreeing to allow independent factory inspectors access to their production sites and to a stringent code of factory ethics. Gap likewise acknowledged that it felt a lot of pressure from the campaign, and that the "pressure was coming from all sides, from labor, religious, consumer, solidarity, children's and women's groups, elected officials, shareholders, universities, high schools, even grammar schools" (The GAP/NLC Agreement, 1995).

Nell Nelson single-handedly exposed workplace atrocities severe enough to foster a collective social mood and motivation to organize and affect change, a process that individuals and organizations continue to this day. Her undercover exposé method was effective in getting the word out in the 1800s, and still remains effective today (i.e. it is the same approach taken by Kernaghen and the NCL). Nelson's work, as argued supra, was the driving force behind the formation of countless social organizations that Clemens (1993) notes were instrumental in affecting change in the political arena both locally and nationally. Kernaghen's work, likewise has resulted in change with Gap, Kathie Lee Gifford and many other retail giants adopting new codes of ethics, minimum hourly rates, and improved working conditions. Implicitly, the effectiveness of this media exposure process lends support to Aldrich's (1999) notion that cultural assumptions are socialized into individuals and guides them most social situations (i.e. evaluating the difference between right and wrong). This implies that a greater public awareness of and exposure to workplace atrocities will aid in mobilizing the resources and action necessary to fully eradicate sweating conditions globally going forward.

Bedeian (1998) noted that to fully understand an enterprise in its broadest sense, one must first understand it historically. Looking back across the last 120 years since Nelson first began her crusade, progress has been made. At the federal level, there exists both a minimum wage for all workers and explicit child labor standards including minimum age and maximum hour components (under the Fair Labor Standards Act). Women are legally viewed as equal, and all workers are covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, national origin, race, color, and religion. Compensation laws protect and aid injured workers and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Act (1970) exists to safeguard working conditions nationally. The Consumer Credit Protection Act (1972) restricts and regulates the garnishment of wages. Certainly, at a national level, we have made much progress and the progress is owed to individuals like Nell Nelson and to the collective action she helped to inspire.

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Appendix 1. Nell Nelson: a brief biography

This manuscript primarily focuses on Nell Nelson's tenure as a reporter for The *Chicago Times* and briefly alluded to her tenure at *The World* newspaper. Yet, little information is presented regarding Nelson's background, family, and life. Synthesizing a variety of resources (Nelson's writings, citations to her work, public records and government documents), this brief biography seeks to provide additional insight into the person responsible for the previous mentioned accomplishments.

The most comprehensive account of Nelson's life is provided by Morris (2003, p. 85), who wrote briefly of "a pretty young, brown-haired and brown-eyed woman who had been a schoolteacher". He described how this young lady became a reporter for The *Chicago Times* and credits her for authoring the slave-girl series of articles. Yet, Morris's recounting is incomplete. He identifies this reporter as "Nell Cusack" (note the spelling) and says that little is known about what happened to her on leaving the newspaper in late 1888. In Morris's supplemental notes he alludes to rumors that "Cusack" went on to marry the editor of a New York newspaper (who subsequently became a wealthy publisher) and that they lived the remainder of their lives in a mansion – a notion likely retrieved from Chapin's autobiography (1920, p. 133).

The name "Nell Nelson" was a pseudonym used by reporter Helen Cusach (McKerns, 1989, p. 101). I estimate Cusach to have been born around 1865. 1930 Census records indicate she and her father were born in Missouri. Cusach's mother was from England. Little could be found on her childhood or of how she came to live in Chicago. In fact, all that is known about Cusach's life prior to 1888 is Chapin's reference to her being a schoolteacher. Cusach's friend and colleague, Elia Peattie, wrote: "Now Nell Nelson, as she is known to the world, is a dear good girl [and] about as sensible a woman as one could find. She always looked like a queen [with] magnificent grey eyes set in an intellectual face, a fine carriage, and a trick of looking well dressed always" (Bloomfield, 2005, p. 172). The only picture/sketch that could be located of Cusach came from a January 5, 1890, *The World* article she authored, "In an Engine Cab: Nell Nelson's Midnight Ride on the Washington Express" (see Figure A1). Peattie portrayed "Nell Nelson" as good natured. To Peattie, Nelson was passionate about her work, well liked by her colleagues, and cared deeply for her family (Bloomfield, 2005, p. 172).

Life in New York seemingly went well for Cusach. She was the second wife of Solomon Solis Carvalho, who she married in May 1895. Carvalho (born 16 January 1856; died 12 April 1942) was a devout Sephardic Jew born and raised in Baltimore, MD. He was schooled in finance and law at the City College of New York and then went on to become a reporter for the City News Association. In 1877 he moved to the Pulitzer organization, where he helped launch the evening edition of *The World*; and in 1892 he was given full jurisdiction over *The World* and made assistant vice president (McKerns, 1989, p. 101). In 1896, Carvalho resigned from the Pulitzer organization and accepted a position in the Hearst organization where he oversaw several publications and began Hearst's magazine empire (Gauvreau, 1941; Koenigsberg, 1941). Ultimately, Carvalho oversaw the entire Hearst organization (including managing Hearst's personal finances) and it is reported that his salary reached $52,000 in the early 1900s, not including a $25,000 bonus received in 1902. In December 1917, Carvalho retired from his full-time position at the Hearst organization, but did continue to work for Hearst for many more years as both a highly paid consultant and chairman of the Hearst Executive Council (McKerns, 1989, p. 102).

The 1930 US Census also reveals that Cusach and Carvalho had two daughters: Helen C. Steele and Sarah C. Crehore. Steele (born 25 December 1892; died 2 February 1989) and Crehore (born 30 December 1897; died 2 November 1994) were both born in New York while Cusach was retired and Carvalho was working for Hearst. Steele went on to follow in her mother's footsteps, becoming a public schoolteacher (*Department of the Interior*, 1922). Crehore's career could not be identified, but I was able to locate records indicating that in her adult life she was an avid animal rights advocate, giving talks at her local SPCA in Westfield, NJ (Westfield Ledger, Miss Budell, 1932, p. 5). Unfortunately, and despite both my efforts and those graciously provided by the

Source: Nelson (1890)

Figure A1.
Helen Cusach Carvalho (aka Nell Nelson; Nelson, 1890)

Westfield Genealogy Society, the Steele and Crehore families were unable to be reached for additional information.

Some truth can be found in Chapin's account of Cusach living happily ever after in a mansion. Cusach and Carvalho lived very comfortably at their home in Metuchen, NJ (valued at $30,000; the 2009 equivalent dollar value would be just over $750,000). Records from the 1930 US Census indicate they had a live-in "negro" maid from Virginia named Elsie Robinson. In the years leading up to Carvalho's retirement, he and Cusach raised horses and acquired one of the largest collections of blue and white china in the country (McKerns, 1989, p. 102). In 1914, they auctioned away the Chinese Porcelain portion of their collection, bringing in a total of $64,785 (New York Times, 1914), the present day equivalent of which is estimated at $1,361,975.05.

Helen Cuasch Carvalho died on Saturday, October 27, 1945 in Plainfield, New Jersey. Her obituary, published in the *New York Times* (1945) made no mention of her life's accomplishments, only of her two children and beloved husband. A private memorial service was held on the morning of Sunday, October 28, 1945 at the A.M. Runyon & Son Home for Services in Plainfield, NJ. For a lady of her era, she appeared to have lived a full life. She had a distinguished career, loving family, affluent life style, and made a contribution that spanned the nation. She was well travelled and educated. She likely was very pleased to see the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) and know that as a nation, the movement towards improved work conditions was underway.

Appendix 2

October 19, 1888.

At a meeting held October 6, at the Palmer House, seventy ladies, representing twenty-six societies of women, decided to take steps towards forming an alliance for the purpose of enforcing the factory ordinance of the City and the compulsory education law of the State. The need of such an organization has been made manifest by the exposure of the conditions surrounding our working girls and children which have appeared in the daily papers during the summer months.

These exposures show that the sanitary conditions surrounding our working girls are a blot upon the nineteenth century civilization, are destructive to womanly purity, are dwarfing the physique, starving the intellect, and weakening the morality of our children, thus sapping the very life-blood of our nation by destroying the manly and womanly virtues on which our country was founded.

The following are the main features of a proposed Constitution which will be submitted for final action at the next meeting.

ARTICLE I.

This organization shall be known as THE ILLINOIS WOMAN'S ALLIANCE.

ARTICLE II.

Its objects are to prevent the moral, mental and physical degradation of women and children as wage-workers, by enforcing the factory ordinances and the compulsory education law; to secure the enactment of such new laws as may be found necessary; and to procure the appointment of women, responsible to this body, as inspectors of establishments where women and children are employed.

ARTICLE III.

The Alliance shall be composed of women sent as delegates from other organizations. Each organization, upon the quarterly payment of one dollar, shall be entitled to send three delegates.

ARTICLE IV.

The work of the Alliance will further include correspondence with the authorities of other localities where factory and educational legislation has been obtained.

Thoughtful women are needed to amend the trying conditions under which their less fortunate sisters are earning their bread, and to secure to children the requisite training for a life of usefulness. The coöperation of your society is earnestly desired to this end. Will you send three delegates, with instructions to act, to the next meeting, which will be held at the Palmer House Club Rooms, November 2, at 2.30 P. M.?

Ladies' Federal Labor Union.

CAROLINE A. HULING, *Chairman of Committee on Constitution, Cook County Woman Suffrage Association.*

ANNIE H. WHITE,
Woodlawn Reading Club.

JENNIE B. HOWISON,
Miriam Chapter O. E. S.

FRANCES M. OWENS,
Ladies' Aid, Pres. Ch., Woodlawn.

ELIZA MORGAN,
Trade and Labor Assembly.

HARRIET M. FOX, M. D.,
Women's Physiological Society.

ALVAH PERRY,
South End Flower Mission.

Inter Ocean

COMPULSORY EDUCATION.

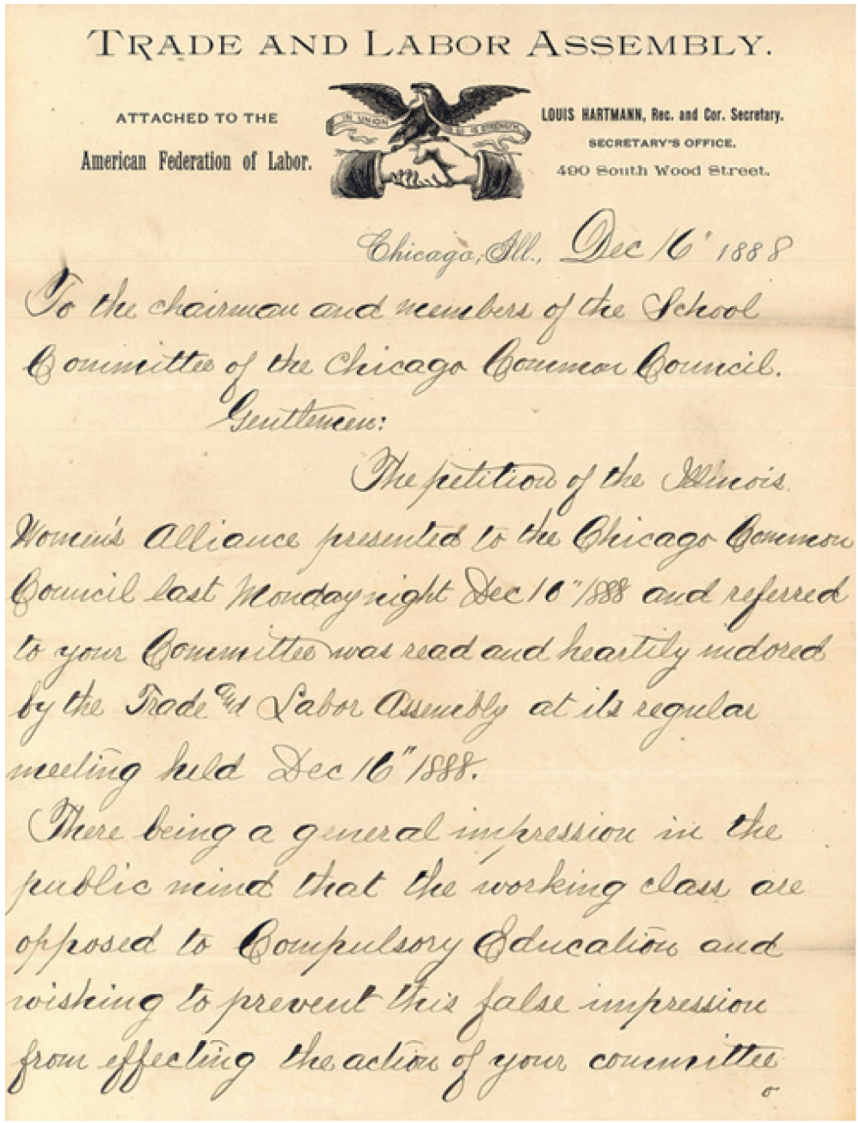
A meeting of the executive committee of the Illinois Women's Alliance was held yesterday

WORK FOR THE WOMEN.

An Alliance Which Hopes to Better the Condition of the Sex.

The Executive Committee of the Woman's Alliance met yesterday afternoon to lay out the plan of work in factories and other places where

Figure A2.
Illinois Woman's Alliance Articles of Organization



TRADE AND LABOR ASSEMBLY.

ATTACHED TO THE
American Federation of Labor.

LOUIS HARTMANN, Rec. and Cor. Secretary.
SECRETARY'S OFFICE.
490 South Wood Street.

Chicago, Ill., Dec 16th 1888

To the chairman and members of the School Committee of the Chicago Common Council.

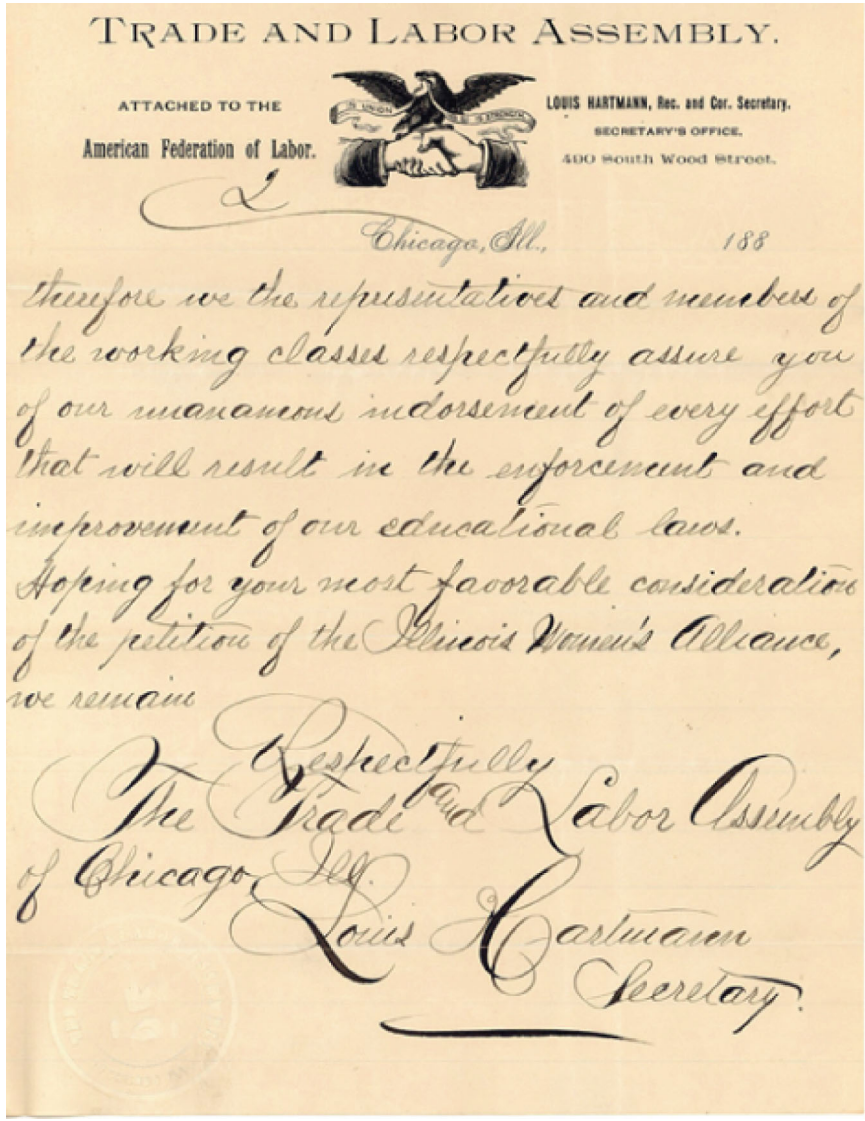
Gentlemen:

The petition of the Illinois Women's Alliance presented to the Chicago Common Council last Monday night Dec 10th 1888 and referred to your Committee was read and heartily indorsed by the Trade & Labor Assembly at its regular meeting held Dec 16th 1888.

There being a general impression in the public mind that the working class are opposed to Compulsory Education and wishing to prevent this false impression from effecting the action of your committee

(*Continued*)

Figure A3.
Letter from the Chicago Trade & Labor Assembly to Chicago Common Council dated 12/16/1888 (page 1 of 2)



TRADE AND LABOR ASSEMBLY.

ATTACHED TO THE

American Federation of Labor.

LOUIS HARTMANN, Rec. and Cor. Secretary.
SECRETARY'S OFFICE.
400 South Wood Street.

Chicago, Ill., 188

Therefore we the representatives and members of the working classes respectfully assure you of our unanimous indorsement of every effort that will result in the enforcement and improvement of our educational laws.

Hoping for your most favorable consideration of the petition of the Illinois Women's Alliance, we remain

Respectfully
The Trade and Labor Assembly
of Chicago Ill.
Louis Hartmann
Secretary.

Figure A4.
Letter from the Trade & Labor Assembly to Chicago Common Council dated 12/16/1888 (page 2 of 2)

Appendix 4

	From	To	Reference
1 Degree of Separation	Nell Nelson	Elia Peattie	Bloomfield (2005)
	Nell Nelson	New York World	Nelson (1888a)
	Nell Nelson	Illinois Woman's Alliance	Morgan Collection
	Nell Nelson	Florence Kelly	Kessler-Harris (1982)
2 Degrees of Separation	Elia Peattie	Nebraska State Federation of Women's Clubs	Boehm (2004)
	Elia Peattie	Omaha Women's Club	Boehm (2004)
	New York World	International Exposure	De Pantoja (1898)
	Illinois Woman's Alliance	Charitable Alliance	Wood (2005)
	Illinois Woman's Alliance	Trade & Labor Assembly of Chicago	Morgan Collection
	Illinois Woman's Alliance	Labor Restrictions for Women & Children	Morgan Collection
	Illinois Woman's Alliance	Florence Kelly	Tax (1980)
	Florence Kelly	The Hull House	Silverberg (1998)
	Florence Kelly	Mary Kenney	Tax (1980)
	Florence Kelly	Workingwomen's Society of Philadelphia	Tax (1980)
	Florence Kelly	National Consumers League	Evans (1989)
3 Degrees of Separation	Charitable Alliance	Anita Ray	Wood (2005)
	Trade & Labor Assembly of Chicago	Trade & Labor Assembly Investigation	Scharnau (1973)
	Hull House	Mary Kenney	Kessler-Harris (1982)
	Hull House	Labor Restrictions for Women & Children	Addams (1910)
	National Consumer League	White Label Campaign	Weiner (1985)
	Mary Kenney	Chicago Ladies' Federal Labor Union	Tax (1980)
	Mary Kenney	Chicago Book Binders Union	Tax (1980)
	Mary Kenney	Women's Trade Union League (Boston)	Tax (1980)
	Mary Kenney	Labor Restrictions for Women & Children	Morgan Collection
4 Degrees of Separation	Trade & Labor Assembly Investigation	Labor Restrictions for Women & Children	Morgan Collection

Note: Additional reference citations are available from the author on request

Table AI.

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