

[Sample Labor History Unit for U.S. History Classes](#)

[Introductory Essay](#)

[Excerpt #1: Paterson and the Labor Movement in the 1880s \(pages 13 - 17\)](#)

1. What is the relationship between migration and economic opportunity? How is that exemplified by Hughes' story?
2. Why was child labor so important to the textiles industries of Paterson?
3. The author writes: "The year 1886 was a tumultuous one for labor activity throughout the United States, and may have presented teenage William with his first exposure to the power, limitations, and consequences of worker strikes." How did conditions in Paterson reflect the "power, limitations, and consequences" of strikes?
4. How did early national labor organizations such as the Knights of Labor try to support local strikers?

[Excerpt #2: The Paterson Weaver Strike of 1901 \(pages 27 - 32\)](#)

1. Despite working in separate mills, why was solidarity between men and women weavers necessary for the strike to succeed?
2. What are "scabs?" How did the striking workers treat scabs?
3. Why and how did the courts get involved in the labor dispute?
4. How did Judge Pitney and many other early 20th century jurists treat striking workers? What was their legal justification for their rulings?
5. What actions did William Hughes take to try and protect striking workers? To what degree were these successful actions?

[Excerpt #3: Mr. Hughes Goes to Washington \(pages 43 - 52\)](#)

1. How did Hughes, as a politician, demonstrate his pro-labor philosophy?
2. Why was Hughes' election to Congress so monumental for the American Federation of Labor?
3. The excerpt states that Hughes ". . . argued the position of the American Federation of Labor that workers did not need protection from foreign manufacturing, but that Congress should act to 'protect [American workers] against the direct competition of the pauper laborers themselves, who are crowding into this country by the thousand. It matters little that the goods are shut out if our ports are thrown open to those who make the goods.' Why would trade unions and pro-labor politicians of the era be against immigration to the United States?
4. How did the opponents trade unions and organized labor seek to undermine their political power?
5. What were the legislative priorities of the American Federation of Labor during the Progressive Era? What was Hughes' role in achieving these goals, and how successful were they?

Made in Paterson: The Life and Legacy of U.S. Senator William Hughes
Discussion Questions and Extension Activities

Excerpt #4: The Silk City Senator (pages 67 - 71)

1. Why did Hughes, perhaps the most pro-union member of the Senate, keep his distance from the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913? Do you think this was appropriate? Why or why not?
2. What diagnosis and solutions did Hughes propose for the labor dispute?
3. What was organized labor's "single most desired goal"? How did Hughes cooperate with labor organizations to achieve this goal? What was the outcome?
4. Some in the new media dubbed Hughes "'The Friend of Those Who Work.'" Evaluate the appropriateness of this title, given all that you've learned about him and what he fought for.

Summary Question:

- A labor movement consists of:
 - Unions and activists, those who organize workers in concerted action to fight unfair policies, raise awareness, negotiate with employers, and celebrate progress.
 - Lawyers and regulators, who use existing laws, regulations, and institutions to defend workers and labor activists from employer overreach or retribution.
 - Politicians and lobbyists, who leverage political power to change laws and create policies which will benefit working people

How does Billy Hughes' life and career illustrate the importance of all three groups during the Progressive Era labor movement?

Extension Activities:

- Research your member of Congress or one of your state's current senators. What position does he or she take on the unions, organized labor, and workers' rights? Have they voted on or introduced any legislation that directly affects workers? To what extent would you rate their beliefs and policies as "pro-worker?" Explain your answer.
- How are unions politically active today, and why is that important? What does that action look like in practice and in outcome? Select one national labor organization and research its political priorities, successes, and failures.
- Why are labor lawyers important? Research a recent event in which an individual or group of workers needed a labor lawyer to help protect their rights through the judicial system. What necessitated this? What was the outcome of the legal dispute?
- What action can and should our federal or state government take to protect workers? Propose a piece of legislation that addresses a problem encountered by workers today. How would your proposal address the issue? Are there any limits to what the government can do? How do you think employers and business owners would react to your idea?