

Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School
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Session One Leader: Alice Paul

Alice Paul was the leader of the National Woman's Party (NWP), an early 20th century suffrage organization dedicated to adding an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote. The most important dilemma Paul faced as leader of the NWP was opposition from the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), a more established suffrage organization headed by Carrie Chapman Catt. NAWSA's approach to winning the vote for women was to lobby individual states to change their constitutions; they did not see any possibility for success in trying to amend the federal constitution. In the late 19th century NAWSA had some success in this "state by state" approach, especially in the west, but by 1912 the momentum had slowed considerably. Younger women, like Alice Paul, became increasingly frustrated by this slow pace of change, and argued for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution as a quicker, more comprehensive strategy to achieve suffrage. This was a dilemma for Paul because if she split from NAWSA over this issue, which she eventually did, she ran the risk of weakening the suffrage movement because limited resources would now be divided between two groups. In addition, this lack of unity might have given ammunition to the opponents of suffrage, who could possibly claim that this divisiveness among the suffrage groups was a sign that women were not yet ready to participate in the political arena.

Despite this dilemma, the time period in which Paul became politically active, particularly the U.S. entry into World War I in 1917, offered a tremendous opportunity for her to exercise her leadership qualities. In order to justify U.S. entry into the war, President Woodrow Wilson framed the issue as a defense of democracy. When Wilson argued in speeches and press conferences that it was important for American soldiers to risk their lives to protect democracy abroad, Paul used Wilson's own pro-democracy quotes to argue that the U.S. needed to fulfill his commitment to democracy at home as well. When the NWP decided to continue to picket the White House during the war, another difficult dilemma faced by Paul, a new opportunity for leadership emerged. As expected, the NWP demonstrations were met with violence, and the picketers were eventually arrested. Paul's decision to join the picketers, and to be arrested, turned out to be an important decision that eventually helped lead to the passage of the 19th amendment. In jail, Paul organized a hunger strike, a tactic she was familiar with from her participation in the English suffrage movement. The negative publicity that resulted from this hunger strike put pressure on President Wilson to support the suffrage amendment, which he did in a 1918 address to Congress.

Session Two Leader: Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh was the leader of North Vietnam who fought the U.S. supported government in South Vietnam in an attempt to unify the country in the 1960's and early 1970's. The most important dilemma Ho Chi Minh faced was the incredible commitment of the U.S. to support a non-communist government in South Vietnam as part of its Cold War strategy of containing communist expansion. During the Cold War the U.S. tended to see all communist uprisings as monolithic movements controlled by the U.S.S.R. When Ho Chi Minh's anti-French guerrilla organization (the Vietminh) was labeled a communist organization by the U.S., what was really a Vietnamese war for independence was deemed a communist revolution controlled by Moscow. As a result, from 1965-1973 the U.S. committed a total of 3 million troops and spent over \$120 billion to combat Ho Chi Minh's forces in Vietnam, a country where the U.S. had very little strategic interest. This was a dilemma for Ho Chi Minh because after overthrowing French rule with the Vietnamese victory at Dienbienphu in 1954, he was certain that his dream of an independent Vietnam was imminent. Instead, Cold War geopolitics dictated that he would now have to defeat the greatest military superpower in the world to achieve that goal.

Ironically, it was policies implemented by the U.S. in its attempt to keep South Vietnam from falling to communist forces that gave Ho Chi Minh his opportunity for success. The U.S. sponsored leaders in South Vietnam, beginning with Ngo Dinh Diem in 1955, tended to be corrupt and ineffective. As a

result, a communist opposition group, the National Liberation Front (NLF), supported by Ho Chi Minh, emerged in the south. The presence of this indigenous opposition group in the south made it much easier for Ho Chi Minh to support the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government from his position as leader of North Vietnam. Two other U.S. policies, the “strategic hamlet” program and the use of “agent orange” further contributed to Ho Chi Minh’s opportunity for success. The “strategic hamlet” program, instituted as early as 1962, was an attempt by the U.S. to control NLF influence in rural villages in South Vietnam. Local people were forced to relocate to villages controlled by the U.S. military in order to keep them from being infiltrated by the NLF. The unintended consequence of this program, however, was an increased resentment towards the U.S., which led to even more support for the anti-U.S. policies of the NLF. Similarly, the U.S. decision to use the defoliant “agent orange” in order to expose the locations of NLF strongholds led many frustrated South Vietnamese villagers to support the NLF due to the negative physical and environmental effects of the toxic chemical. Eventually increased support for the NLF in the south combined with the support it received from Ho Chi Minh in the north led the U.S. to negotiate an end to the war in 1973. In 1975 Vietnam was unified under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh.

Session Three Leader: Nikola Tesla

Nikola Tesla was a scientist who emigrated from Croatia to the United States in 1884. He is most famous for winning the “War of the Currents” by

demonstrating the superiority of alternating current (AC) over direct current (DC) for transmitting electricity over long distances. The most important dilemma Tesla faced was opposition from his idol Thomas Edison, who developed the first commercial transmission of electricity using DC in 1882. Edison had a tremendous stake in supporting DC; if AC was accepted as the main method of electrical transmission Edison stood to lose the income from the patents he held on DC transmission. As a result Edison waged a nasty propaganda campaign against Tesla's AC method. Edison tried to show that AC was dangerous by using it in horrible demonstrations that involved electrocuting animals, and arguing that AC would be more lethal than DC when used to electrocute criminals. This was a dilemma for Tesla because Edison was widely respected as the scientific leader of the emerging field of electricity. His opposition to Tesla's idea for AC made it more difficult for Tesla's ideas to be accepted, even though his method clearly solved the problem of transmitting electricity over long distances. Moreover, this conflict with Edison, who Tesla idolized, must have caused Tesla to question his own ideas about the feasibility of AC at times. The fact that he stood up to Edison's criticism and eventually won the "War of the Currents" is a tribute to Tesla's persistence and confidence.

Tesla took advantage of two important opportunities, both of which occurred in 1893, to take the lead in the electricity battle. The first opportunity was at the Chicago World's Fair, where the Westinghouse Electric Company supplied all of the electric lights and power for the fair using Tesla's AC method. As a result of the success of AC in Chicago, British physicist Lord Kelvin became

a convert to Tesla's system. This was particularly important because Kelvin was the head of the international Niagara Falls Commission, which was formed in 1891 and charged with planning the project that would harness the power of Niagara Falls for electrical production. Kelvin recommended that AC be used for this project, so the Niagara Falls contract went to Westinghouse. There was still a great deal of concern about whether Tesla's system would work. Many doubted that the system would bring electricity to nearby Buffalo, but Tesla's confidence never wavered. When the switch was finally thrown in 1896, power quickly reached Buffalo. Within a few years electricity from the Niagara Falls Project was used in New York City. Tesla's persistence and confidence, two very important leadership qualities, enabled him to take advantage of the opportunities presented to him in 1893 to win the "War of the Currents".

Session Four Leader: Robert Morris

Robert Morris was an African-American attorney who represented the Roberts' family in their 1849 lawsuit that attempted to end racial segregation in the Boston public schools. The most important dilemma faced by Morris was the racist attitude toward African-Americans in Boston in the 19th century. At the time

blacks in Boston struggled to change laws that prohibited interracial marriage and established segregated railway cars. The white community often responded to these efforts with violent resistance. In addition, black students who excelled, despite inferior buildings and resources, were not recognized with the same academic awards accorded white students in the city. These racial attitudes were a major dilemma for Morris because they represent the formidable obstacle he faced in arguing for integrated schools on behalf of his client. If white Bostonians were so opposed to interracial marriage and integrated railway cars, they would certainly dig their heels in even more on the issue of school desegregation, which was more of a threat to white power than the other two issues. One could avoid an interracial marriage, and it might be argued that one could also avoid integrated railway cars; it was much more difficult for a white Bostonian to avoid integrated schools. Moreover, education was seen as the key to social advancement. If blacks students were to receive the same education as white students, this could be seen as an opportunity for Blacks to advance socially at the expense of whites.

Although Morris lost the Roberts case, he took advantage of a very important opportunity in the 1850's to continue the fight for school desegregation in Boston. In 1850 Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, and the Black community in Boston immediately resisted the law. Morris played an important role in this resistance, even being arrested and charged with treason for helping a fugitive named Shadrach Minkins escape from slave catchers. Although he was acquitted, Morris' willingness to risk everything, both personally and

professionally, to actively resist an unjust law showed tremendous leadership qualities. Morris and the rest of Boston's black community worked tirelessly to expose the injustice of the Fugitive Slave Law, and these efforts helped win many whites to the abolitionist cause. Eventually the issue of abolition became entwined with the issue of civil rights for free blacks, paving the way for the eventual integration of Boston's schools in 1855. An important leadership quality is the willingness to do what's morally correct even in the face of personal adversity. Robert Morris showed this quality in the Minkins incident. In my opinion, this was just as important a contribution to the integration of Boston's schools as his providing counsel to the plaintiff in the Roberts case.

Session Five Leader: Unita Blackwell

Unita Blackwell was a sharecropper from Mississippi who became active in the drive to register black voters in the south during the "freedom summer" of 1964. The most important dilemma Blackwell faced was the harsh resistance of whites in Mississippi to black political, economic and social progress. Despite

having the largest black population in the U.S., only 6% of blacks in Mississippi were registered to vote in 1964. Moreover, whites in the state were not opposed to using violence to maintain this status quo. In the summer of 1964 three civil rights workers who were actively trying to register black voters were murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Racist attitudes were so entrenched that when the widow of one of the victims confronted the governor to try to get information about what had happened to her husband, the governor pushed by her on his way into his office, quickly locking the door behind him. This was an important dilemma for Blackwell because she truly put herself in physical danger by pursuing her commitment to voter registration. This danger became clear to her when she and seven others tried to register to vote in June, 1964. As the group waited outside the local courthouse the sheriff tried to convince them that this was a mistake; that they were simply be led astray by outside agitators. In addition, a group of local men arrived and began harassing the group, threatening them with guns. Blackwell describes how this made the many instances of racial violence that she'd read and heard about in Mississippi real to her for the first time. Despite these dilemmas, Blackwell remained committed to registering to vote, though it did not happen for her on that day.

The incredible courage that Blackwell demonstrated on that day outside the courthouse was a sign of her leadership capability. I'm not sure, however, that she truly realized her potential until she was given the opportunity to do so. The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was largely responsible for providing that opportunity. SNCC's work in the summer of 1964

focused on registering black voters. When Blackwell and her friend Coreen met members of SNCC in June, Coreen was reluctant to “get mixed up with them folks” out of fear of violent white backlash. Blackwell certainly understood her friend’s fear, but she decided to attend a meeting hosted by SNCC, claiming that it really didn’t matter if she ended up being killed, as she was “dying anyway”. Blackwell was impressed by arguments made by the SNCC workers in favor of black voting rights. She understood that participation in the political process was the key to blacks gaining better housing, schools, and jobs. Despite living in a state where working for these goals put her in serious physical danger, Blackwell eventually registered to vote, helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and later became the first African-American woman mayor of a Mississippi town.

Session Six Leaders: Immigrant Women Workers in Lawrence

Immigrant woman played an important role in the success of the “bread and roses” strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. One of the most important dilemmas these women faced was the challenge of difficult living and working conditions in Lawrence in the early 20th century. Competition in the textile industry caused a decline in wages, at the same time that prices were going up.

Fluctuations in the textile market often led to inconsistent hours. Less than half of the city's workforce was able to work a full 56-hour week. The strain of low wages and high prices, combined with the traditional obligation of women to care for the family, made it difficult for the women of Lawrence to focus their energy on anything other than survival. The larger issue of worker exploitation would have been hard to address under these circumstances. Two other important dilemmas faced by the women were the problems of unity and communication. The immigrant community in Lawrence represented people from many different parts of Europe. These people spoke different languages and adhered to different cultural traditions, making a united front against the textile manufacturers very difficult. Moreover, many of these ethnic groups often mistrusted each other, further hampering any protest efforts.

Two important opportunities gave the women the chance to overcome these dilemmas and lead the successful strike in 1912. The most important of these was the informal communication networks that were an important part of the lives of the women on a daily basis. Although communication was a dilemma, the fact that immigrant women interacted with each other informally helped to overcome this obstacle. By doing things like watching each other's children, advising each other on where to get the best prices on necessities, and sharing chores like cooking and laundry the women laid the groundwork for a communication network that would be essential during the strike. Unlike men, who tended to socialize at clubs that included only their own ethnic group,

women socialized in informal settings like public courtyards and front porches. These social interactions transcended ethnic divisions, and played a key role in the ability of these different immigrant groups to unite during the 1912 strike. Another opportunity to exercise leadership during the strike stemmed from the traditional woman's role as "keeper of the purse" in the family. In this role women cultivated important relationships with the shopkeepers in town who depended on their business. During the strike the women were able to leverage these relationships to get the local merchants to set up soup kitchens and extend credit, both of which allowed the strikers to hold out against the companies longer. The informal communication networks and the ability to put pressure on local shopkeepers were two important leadership contributions made by immigrant women textile workers that helped the workers of Lawrence gain an important victory in their 1912 strike.