

# Labor union movement



I. How does the story you read about A. E. Staley fit with what you read in *Why Unions Matter*? What were the obstacles that the African-American workers at Staley had to work through before becoming involved in the union's campaign? What would you have done if you were them -- would you have gotten involved in the union's struggle? What do you think are the lessons of their experience? How can America reach the point where all people, regardless of race or ethnicity or national background, are treated equally in the workplace?

In addition, you can also engage your fellow students by responding to their analysis. This case study illustrates both the capacities and the limitations faced by the labor union movement. On the one hand, union organizing is a vital strategy for garnering fair wages, healthy working conditions, and collective bargaining. On the other hand, it also demonstrates the fact that often times labor unions get caught up in their own bureaucratic red-tape to the detriment of their cause.

In this particular case we can see how African-Americans were adversely affected by the unfair treatment they received from both the restrictions and hurdles they had to overcome in order to gain acceptance in the union, and furthermore by the unfair conditions and pay that they received from A. E. Staley's management practices. If I had been a worker at the time, especially an African-American, I would have done whatever I could to get into the labor union because that was one of the only ways to protect your job, no matter how terrible you were being treated. Read about labor movements

I say this because it would have been hard enough to get a decent job as an African American in that racial climate to begin with, so I would have

completely committed myself to keeping the job with the determination to speak my voice, along with my co-workers, in order to reach a critical mass where we could no longer be ignored. This would have been a terrible time and situation to find yourself without a paycheck at the end of the week, especially if you had a family to support, but in the long run it would I think it would have been the best and most respected choice to be made.

II. Use Why Unions Matter, the Ashby-Hawking chapter on Staley, the AFL-CIO website, and your own knowledge and experience to discuss what you think are the central issues facing women in the workplace today. If you are male, you may want to seek out one or more women friends to ask their views. How can America reach the point where women and men are treated equally in the workplace? In addition, you can also engage your fellow students by responding to their analysis. Gender discrimination is a key issue in both the labor and human rights movements.

With the rise of feminism and the fight for equal pay for equal work, women have had to continuously struggle to gain both the right to work and the right to be treated equally as men with dignity and respect. To further complicate the issue, women have had to endure more subtle forms of gender discrimination in the workplace. For example, many women find themselves stuck in administrative positions without room for promotion, or they find themselves being patronized by male superiors.

More troublesome is the latent sexual harassment women go through at their job but are sometimes hesitant to report for fear of being labeled negatively in the company and then not being able to continue their career. In order to reach a level of equality for all, America needs to learn and

encourage the value of diversity, across demographics. Heterogeneity of thought drives creativity and that eventually leads to more progressive and productive working and living environments.