

Not caring for
country's future over
profits: child
labourers in usa and
dangerou...

[History](#)



“ Tonight while we sleep, several thousand little girls will be working in textile mills.” The United States industrialized in the 19th and 20th centuries and because of it, several Americans grew proud of their prospering economy. Nevertheless, industrialization also meant the rise of monopolies and large corporations that were responsible of poor working conditions. All the while unions formed to protect the work force, child labor was generally accepted throughout America. For this reason, U. S. social worker and reformer, Florence Kelley, in her speech to the NAWSA, reveals to her audience the harsh conditions found in child labor. She adopts an informative yet poignant tone as she presents her message of reforming child labor laws. With concrete examples, evocative imagery, and subtle irony the audience becomes aware of Kelley’s underlying messages.

Florence Kelley begins her speech by exposing the inhumane conditions that working children had to face in the early 20th Century. She makes it clear that the issues of child labor are relevant to most American citizens; it is not “ only in the South that these things occur,” but also in New Jersey, laws permit fourteen-year-old boys and girls to “ enjoy the pitiful privilege” of working all night long. Kelley also points out that “ mothers and teachers” did not have the right to vote at the time, so there wasn’t much that they could do to aid the children working in the mills. In essence, Kelley connects the neglected rights of children to that of women. While defining most of the children workers as “ young girls,” she implies that women suffered even as children. With a passionate yet mildly caustic tone, Kelley indicates that these women-to-be children will be relieved of suffering the day that, for a change, “ mothers and teachers” are granted the right to vote.”

Kelley continues to emphasize her stance on reforming child labor laws by appealing to her audience's sense of guilt. In order to do so, she paints graphic images into the minds of her audience with evocative imagery. She describes the toil of the " young girls" working at the textile mills " all night through, in the deafening noise of the spindles and looms," all for ribbons to sell. Her tone shifts from informative to poignant as she explains, " no one in this room tonight can feel free from such participation." She continues by elaborating on the countless forms of labor that these children are subjected to under the " sweating system," from knitting stockings to wearing cotton underwear. This evokes sympathy and makes some of the most unscrupulous people want to aid these " beasts of burden."

An important element that Kelley adds is the irony in child labor. She does so by pointing out some occasions in which American society was backwards. She illustrates a 13-year-old girl " carrying her pail of midnight luncheon as happier people carry their midday luncheon." Children are working to the point where they become the leading work force, making most of the commodities that adults consume. It is this backward society that Kelly attempts to display, in which children are the care-takers of the adults; women have no form of having a legitimate voice; for the sake of the " Republic", that American men have boasted for so long, it's women are stripped of their rights.