

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 4: "City of Immigrants"

"Placing the Responsibility" Article

This newspaper article, published in 1911 one month after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, describes the findings of the Grand Jury in the cases of two women who died in the fire. The jury decided that conditions in the factory, such as locked doors and cramped work areas, prevented women from escaping the fire. The jury also urged new laws and reforms, such as regular inspections by the Fire Department, to be made to make factories safer for workers in the future.

Harris and Blanck, who comprise the firm whose employees *were* burned, and who had been already indicted (charged) by the Grand Jury, were declared responsible for the death of the two women whose cases were presented to the coroner's jury, because of culpable and criminal negligence (lack of care or attention) in leaving a door locked which should have permitted these women to escape.

Furthermore, the jury declared that no attention had been given or means provided for quick exit of the employees, but that, on the contrary, their safety had been utterly disregarded. The crowding of tables and lack of passageways are instanced, as well as the locking of doors.

The jury declared that the conditions obtaining in this factory were such that, if they were not forbidden by law, such a law should be instantly framed (proposed).

The jury recommends that fire-escapes should be regularly inspected by the Fire Department and reported to the Bureau of Buildings, and that then the latter should order changes made and have power to enforce such orders.

Concentration of responsibility is strongly urged, and there are specific recommendations for improvement of the laws or practice as regards inspection of factory buildings, the construction of stairways, the use of automatic sprinklers, and the posting of rules in the buildings.

The public continues to take the strongest possible interest in the investigation as to the cause of this fire, and will agree with the coroner (public official who determines the cause of death when people die in sudden or violent ways) in his thanks to the jury for doing a work of great benefit to the public, and also in his hope that the jury's recommendation will result in immediate and practical reform.

Source: "Placing the Responsibility," *The Outlook*, April 29, 1911, p. 949.

