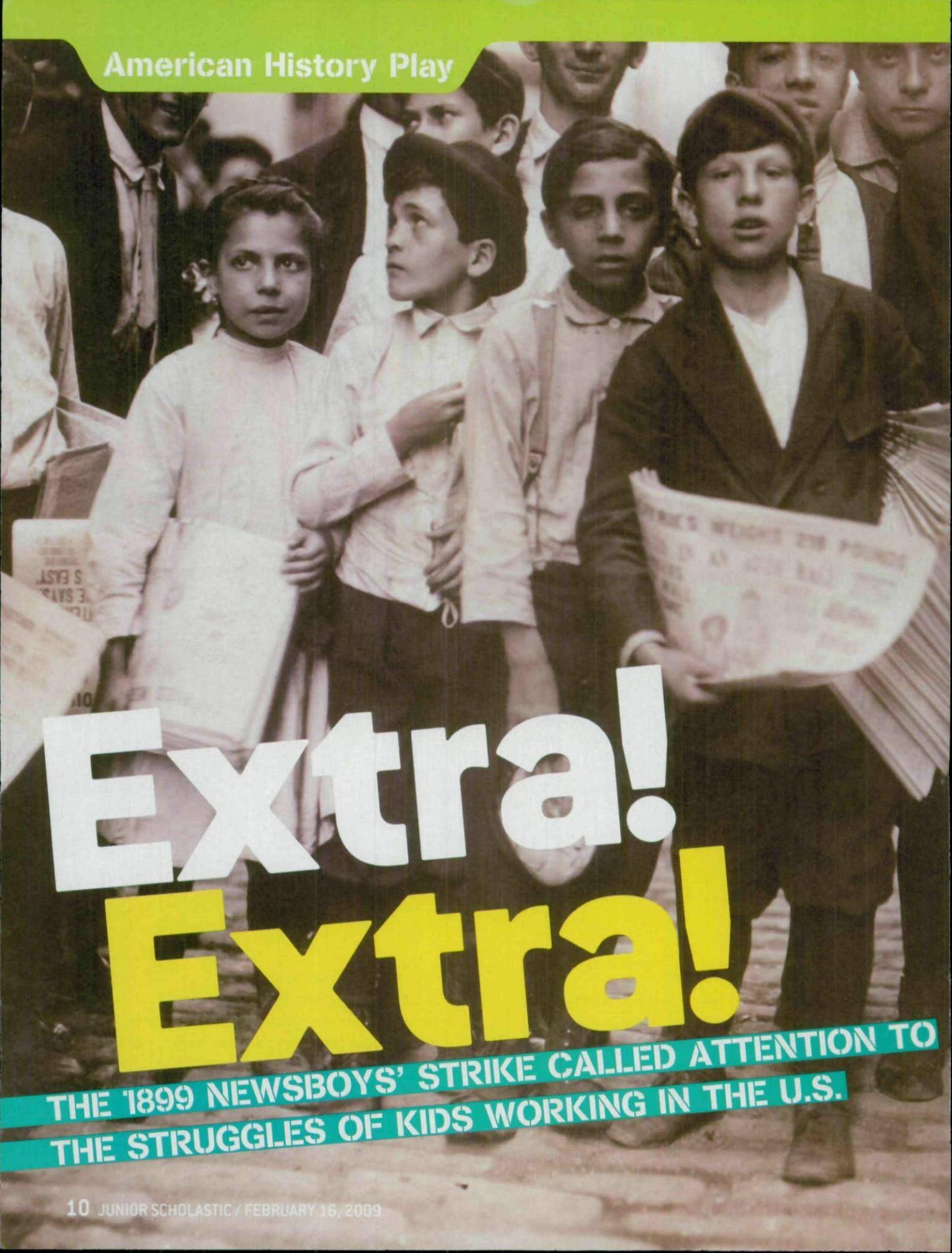


American History Play



Extra! Extra!

THE 1899 NEWSBOYS' STRIKE CALLED ATTENTION TO
THE STRUGGLES OF KIDS WORKING IN THE U.S.



Newsies gather their papers in New York City around the beginning of the 20th century.

CHARACTERS

Prologue narrator

*Rookie newsie

*Newsies 1-4

Racetrack Higgins

Dave Simons

Kid Blink

William Randolph Hearst, a publisher

*Scabs 1 & 2

Narrators A-E

Epilogue narrator

*indicates a fictional character.

All others were real people.

Leaders of the
newsies

PROLOGUE

Prologue narrator: In the spring and summer of 1898, the Spanish-American War was raging between the United States and Spain. Millions of Americans eagerly sought out newspapers each day to read about the war. In big cities such as New York, papers like *The Evening Journal* and *The Evening World* were sold on the streets, mostly by boys aged 8 to 15. "Newsies," everybody called them.

It was a hard life. Some of the newsies were orphans. Others were from immigrant families. Many were homeless. All of them were poor and had to hustle to survive. As for the *Journal's* and *World's* millionaire publishers—William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer—their world and the newsies' couldn't have been farther apart.

Then in late 1898, as the war with Spain wound down, the newsies' rough life was about to get rougher.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: It is July 19, 1899. As usual, the newsies gather outside the newspaper offices to buy stacks of papers to sell. For months, a feeling of discontent has been growing. Some of the more experienced newsies explain it to a newcomer.

Rookie newsie: How much do you get paid?

Newsie 1: Paid? Look, here's how it works. The publisher sells us a stack of 100 newspapers. Then we sell each copy for a penny and keep the difference.

Newsie 2: Except two things have happened. Last year it cost us 50 cents for a stack. Then Hearst and Pulitzer got greedy and raised our price to 60 cents!

Newsie 3: Not only that, but as soon as the war ended, people stopped buying papers. We can't

An 1899 penny.

keep paying this 60 cents.

Every day I lose money because I can't sell all of my stack.

Newsie 4: I don't have a family to support me. If the prices don't go back to what they were before the war, I won't be able to survive.

Narrator B: Three older newsies—Racetrack Higgins, Dave Simons, and Kid Blink—decide to fight the higher prices.

Racetrack Higgins: We have to get the publishers' attention. I vote that we strike! If we don't sell any newspapers, then the publishers won't make money. They'll have to lower the prices we pay!

Dave Simons: I agree. If we strike, Hearst and Pulitzer will be forced to listen. Let's round up all the newsies from New York and New Jersey.

Kid Blink (to the newsies): Don't let anyone sell *The Evening World* or *The Evening Journal*! If anyone tries to sell the papers, they're against us. Rip up their papers and overturn the delivery carts. We are going to force prices down!

Narrator C: The newsies cheer as they topple carts of papers in front of the *World* and *Journal* offices.

SCENE 2

Narrator D: On July 22, the striking newsies gather outside Hearst's office and wait for him to arrive. When the publisher comes around the corner, Kid Blink introduces himself and the other newsies.

Kid Blink: Mr. Hearst, we will not sell your papers unless you agree to lower the price to 50 cents for 100 papers.

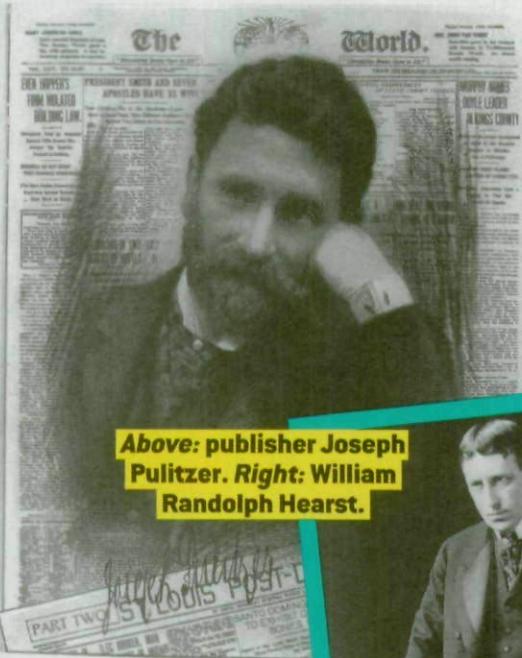
William Randolph Hearst: Hmmm. Why don't we go talk in my office?

Narrator E: Kid Blink, Racetrack, and

Continued on next page →



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Above: publisher Joseph Pulitzer. **Right:** William Randolph Hearst.

Dave follows Hearst inside. After several minutes, the three newsies return to the street.

Kid Blink (*to the crowd of newsies*): Mr. Hearst says that he's going to think about what we said. He'll give us an answer in two days. Meanwhile, we've got to continue our strike!



SCENE 3

Narrator A: Two days later, the boys get word that Hearst and Pulitzer will not lower their prices. Then the news gets worse.

Rookie newsie: Did you hear? The newspapers are getting older boys and paying them two dollars a day to sell our papers. Hundreds of them have signed up.

Newsie 1: Strikebreakers! They're trying to ruin our strike.

Newsie 2: Scabs is what we call them. They're scoundrels—them and the scab sheets they sell.

Narrator B: One day, Kid Blink, Dave, and other newsies find scabs

selling papers on a street corner.

Scab 1 (*calling out*): Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

Dave: Hey! What do you think you're doing? Nobody should be selling the *World* or the *Journal*. Join the strike or leave!

Scab 2: Why should we care about your strike? I can earn good money selling papers, and there isn't a thing

you can do about it.

Kid Blink: That's what *you* think. Even though you are older and stronger, there are more of us, and we will stop you!

Narrator C: Newsies grab the scabs' papers. A fight breaks out. Three police officers arrive and chase the strikers off. Hearst and Pulitzer have gotten the police to work against the

strike. The newsies regroup around the corner.

Kid Blink: We need to keep going. If we intimidate the scabs, they'll stop selling. If we stop newspaper deliveries, nothing can be sold!

Dave: Fan out across the city and tell the other fellows what to do. Raid newspaper stands and delivery carts. Attack any and all scabs!

Kid Blink: We'll have a meeting tonight to rally the newsies.

Narrator D: The police make some arrests, but the newsies continue their raids.

SCENE 4

Narrator E: That night, 5,000 newsies from across New York City and northern New Jersey gather at Irving Hall, a downtown auditorium, to support the strike. Only 2,000 can fit in the hall, so the rest gather outside in the street.

Racetrack (*onstage*): Thank you for coming. The strike is growing. Everyone is sticking together, and we are going to win!

Narrator A: Boys in the hall and on the street cheer loudly. Kid Blink speaks next.

Kid Blink: We really need to stay together. Hearst and Pulitzer think that they can break us by hiring more scabs. They are wrong! We fight for what we believe in. Most of us are poor. If 10 cents means so much to the rich publishers, then imagine what it means to us!

Narrator B: Another big cheer rocks the building and the street.

Kid Blink: I recommend only one change. I think we need to end violent attacks. I don't believe in violence anymore. I know that I led some of the

A newsboy in New York City in the late 1800s.

raids, but we can win by simply refusing to sell. Stick together, and we will be victorious!

Narrator C: The crowd erupts with cheers. The 5,000 newsies flood the streets, eager to continue the strike. However, some boys question why they should stop attacking scabs and ripping up their newspapers.

SCENE 5

Narrator D: Four days later, the strike is still on, but attacks on scabs and delivery carts are less frequent.

Narrator E: Kid Blink and Dave Simons have been noticeably absent from newsie gatherings. There are rumors that the strike is weakening and that the two leaders may

have been paid off by the *Journal* and *World*. The newsies gather outside the newspaper offices.

Racetrack: It looks like Hearst and Pulitzer are doing everything they can to beat the strike. I've never seen so many scabs on the streets.

Newsie 3: I hear they're getting paid an extra 40 cents for every 100 papers they sell. Maybe we should back off for now.

Narrator A: The newsies begin to walk down the street but stop when they see Dave Simons leading a group of scabs to sell papers.

Newsie 4: That's Dave! He's a traitor!

Racetrack: Get him, boys! Forget what Kid Blink said about stopping the violence.

Nobody sells scab sheets—especially not a traitor!

Narrator B: The newsies mob Dave and the other scabs. They tear up the papers and knock Dave to the ground. Police rush in to break up the fight. Suddenly, the newsies see another familiar face.

Newsie 1: Look! It's Kid Blink! He was bought off too! He even has brand-new clothes!

Racetrack: No wonder he asked us to stop the attacks. I knew something was fishy. Get him!

Narrator C: The newsies chase their former leaders off. Despite this loss, the strikers stick together. After another week, Hearst and Pulitzer realize that the strike cannot be bro-



ken. Sales have declined by two thirds. In the end, the publishers don't lower the price of their papers. But they do agree to buy back any papers the newsies cannot sell. The newsies' courage has been rewarded.

EPILOGUE

Epilogue narrator: The newsboys' strike was crucial in the fight for fair labor practices across the U.S. Over the next 20 years, kids who worked in coal mines and textile mills also went on strike. The strikes highlighted the poor conditions that working kids often faced. In 1938, the U.S. Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act (see sidebar). It set a minimum age and work-hour limits for kids across the country. JS

Think About It

1. In what ways did the publishers of *The Evening World* and *The Evening Journal* try to undermine the newsies' strike? How did the strike eventually end?
2. Do you think violence against the scabs was justified? Why or why not? How might the other newsies have responded to them without using violence?

CHILD LABOR TODAY

Today, 5.5 million young people between the ages of 12 and 17 are legally employed, according to the Child Labor Coalition. By the time you finish high school, you probably will have held a job. The Fair Labor Standards Act makes sure that work doesn't interfere with your education or threaten your health. Protect yourself by knowing your rights:

1 You must be at least 16 to work at most jobs.

2 Teens who are 14 and 15 may work certain jobs, but not for more than 3 hours on a school day.

3 The federal minimum wage is \$6.55 per hour and will go up to \$7.25 per hour on July 24, 2009.



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