

## Albert Parsons Structured Academic Controversy

**Central Historical Question:**  
*Was Albert Parsons a dangerous man?*

### Materials:

- Copies of Albert Parsons Documents A-F
- Copies of Guiding Questions
- Copies of Haymarket Timeline
- Copies of SAC Graphic Organizer

### Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: Hand out Haymarket Timeline and read through with students. Explain that the Haymarket Riot was a major event of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and historians still try to understand why certain people were rounded up and executed.
2. Mini-lecture:  
In the aftermath of the Haymarket Square bombing, eight men were put on trial:
  - Albert Parsons (led English-speaking anarchists)
  - August Spies (led German-speaking anarchists)
  - Samuel Fielden (Methodist pastor, draft animal teamster, labor activist, anarchist)
  - Michael Schwab (co-editor of anarchist newspaper for German immigrant workers)
  - George Engel (labor union activist and anarchist)
  - Adolph Fischer (labor union activist and anarchist)
  - Louis Lingg (carpenter, 23-year-old, known to make small bombs)
  - Oscar Neebe (yeast-maker, labor activist, anarchist)

Albert Parsons was the most famous. He was hanged on November 11, 1887. Today, we're going to look at a few documents about him and his role in the Haymarket event. *Your job is to determine whether you think he was a dangerous man or not.*

**Note:** If students are unfamiliar with the political philosophy of anarchism as well as American anarchism and the labor movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (particularly the fight for an 8-hour work day), discuss this with them before proceeding.

2. Hand out Albert Parsons Document Set and Guiding Questions. In pairs, students work through Guiding Questions in their notebooks.  
**Note:** You might want to assign Guiding Questions for homework the night before the SAC.
3. Put students in groups of four. Within each group, one pair should be Team A and one should be Team B. Explain SAC procedures as outlined on SAC Graphic

Organizer. A SAC is NOT a debate, each group presents its side and the other group has to listen.

4. In pairs, students come up with evidence to support their claim and begin filling out the SAC Graphic Organizer.
  5. TEAM A presents their side to TEAM B. TEAM B listens and repeats back the argument to TEAM A.
  6. TEAM B presents their side to TEAM A. TEAM A listens and repeats back their argument to TEAM B.
  7. Groups of four try to reach consensus.
  8. Discussion: Groups report out. *Was Parsons dangerous? Why or why not?*
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#### Citations

##### Document A

U.S. Congress, House, *Investigation by a Select Committee of the House of Representatives relative to the Causes of the General Depression in Labor and Business etc*, 45th Cong. 3d. Session, Mis. Doc. No. 29 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1879).

##### Document B

Albert R. Parsons, "What is Anarchism?" *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis, as Defined by Some of its Apostles* (Chicago, 1887). Reprinted in Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont, eds. *Haymarket Scrapbook* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986), 27–28.

##### Document C

Caleb Crain, The Terror Last Time: What Happened at Haymarket? *The New Yorker*, March 13, 2006. Retrieved from [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/03/13/060313crbo\\_books](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/03/13/060313crbo_books)

##### Document D

The Anarchists' Trial; New Witness Strengthen the Prosecution. Retrieved from <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D05E0D91030E533A2575BC2A9619C94679FD7CF>

##### Document E

Lucy Parsons, *Life of Albert R. Parsons*, (Chicago: 1889), 211–212. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/lifeofalbertpar00pars>.

##### Document F

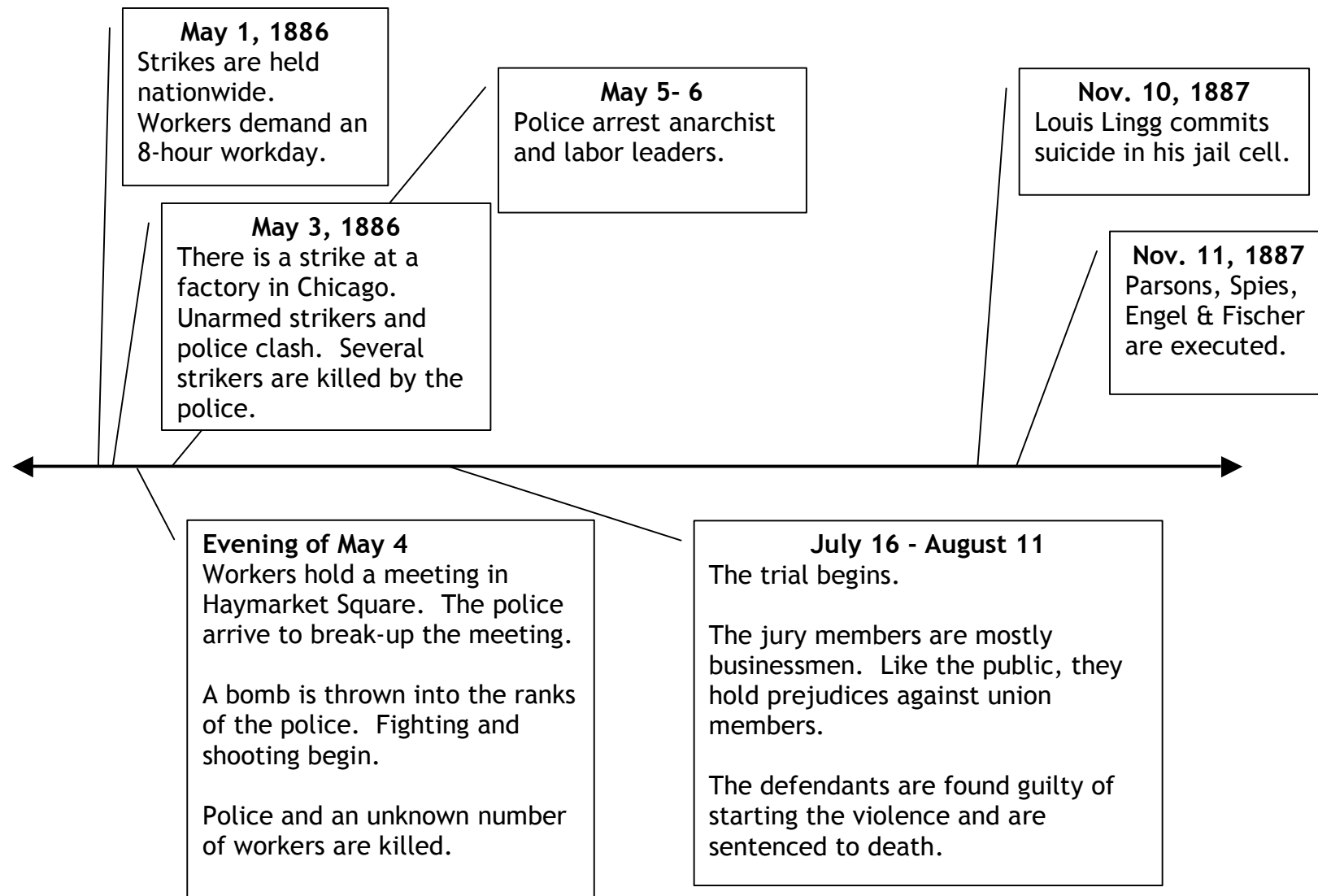
Dyer D. Lum, *The Great Trial of the Chicago Anarchists*, (Socialistic Publishing Co., 1886), 112–113. <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/file.php?file=lum.html>

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## Haymarket Affair Timeline

The "Haymarket Affair" is a series of events that occurred in Chicago during the years 1886 and 1887. Some of the events are disputed or not fully understood. The events that are generally agreed to be part of the Haymarket story are as follows:



## Document A: Albert Parsons's Testimony (Modified)

Congress has the power, under the Constitution, to pass an 8-hour work-day. We ask it; we demand it, and we intend to have it. If the present Congress will not give it to us we will send men to Congress who will give it to us. . . .

We do not propose to bring an industrial confusion or a state of anarchy, or to **precipitate** revolution or a state of anarchy, or to start revolution in this country.

We are peaceable citizens, husbands, fathers. We are citizens of the State and law-abiding men. . . . The working classes simply seek to improve their condition. This is a natural feeling, and I cannot say that there is anything unnecessarily criminal in such a desire. We simply want less work and more pay, knowing that only through short hours and high wages can our condition be improved. We know this, and so we struggle for it. We wish to get at it by degrees.

**Source:** *Excerpt from Albert Parsons's testimony to the House of Representatives Select Committee on Causes of the General Depression in Labor and Business, 1879.*

### Vocabulary

precipitate: bring about suddenly

## Document B: Albert Parsons's Article (Modified)

*In this article, written in 1887, Albert Parsons explains what anarchism means to him. The article appears in a book called Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis, as Defined by Some of its Apostles.*

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What, then, is our offense, being anarchists? The word anarchy is derived from the two Greek words *an*, meaning no, or without, and *arche*, government; hence anarchy means no government. Anarchy means a society which has no king, emperor, president or ruler of any kind.

The purpose, the only purpose of **capital** is to take away the product of the wage-workers. The origin of government was in violence and murder. Government enslaves the governed. Government is for slaves; free men govern themselves. . . .

The right to live, to equality of opportunity, to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, is yet to be acquired by the workers. . . . Capital and government stand or fall together. They are twins. The liberty of labor makes the government not only unnecessary, but impossible. When the people—the whole people—become the government, that is, participate equally in governing themselves, the government ceases to exist. . .

Anarchy, therefore, is liberty; is the **negation** of force, or compulsion, or violence.

Anarchy would strike from humanity every chain that binds it, and say to mankind: "Go forth! you are free! Have all, enjoy all!"

**Source:** "What Is Anarchism?" by Albert Parsons, 1887.

### Vocabulary

capital: the accumulation of wealth or the people who possess this wealth

negation: absence

## Document C: Labor Historian (Modified)

The anarchists were indeed fond of dynamite, then a recent invention. Its main ingredient, nitroglycerin, had been around since the 1840s, but not until Alfred Nobel found a way to stabilize it, by mixing it with an inert filler, did it become safe enough for widespread use. . . . “Dynamite is the **diffusion** of power,” Parsons explained at the trial. “It is democratic; it makes everybody equal.” . . .

“If we would achieve our liberation,” Parsons had told a crowd of protesters in April of 1885, “every man must lay by a part of his wages, buy a Colt’s navy revolver, a Winchester rifle, and learn how to make and use dynamite.”

**Source:** *The excerpt above is from a review of labor historian James Green’s 2006 book, Death in the Haymarket.*

### Vocabulary

diffusion: spreading out

## Document D: New York Times Article (Modified)

### The Anarchists' Trial: New Witnesses Strengthen the Prosecution, Testify to the Incendiary Speeches

At the Anarchist trial this morning a newspaper reporter testified that he was at the Haymarket meeting. Parsons in his speech said: "What good are those strikes going to do? What do you think you are going to gain by them? Do you think you are going to gain your point? No, you will have to go back to work for less wages than you formerly received."

When he mentioned the name of **Jay Gould** someone cried, "Hang him; throw him in the lake." Parsons said: "No, no; that won't do. If Jay Gould was put out of the way today another Jay Gould or 100 Jay Goulds would rise up. It is not the man, but the system, that ought to be destroyed." . . .

Detective Cosgrove also testified about Parsons's speech. He estimated the crowd at 2,000 and said it was very unruly and excited. Parsons near the close of his speech frequently cried, "To arms," which served to greatly increase the excitement.

**Source:** *The article above was published in the New York Times on July 28, 1886.*

#### Vocabulary

Jay Gould: an American capitalist widely criticized for corruption and strikebreaking

## Document E: Letter to Lucy Parsons (Modified)

*While in jail, Parsons wrote the letter below to his wife Lucy Parsons, who was also a radical labor activist and anarchist. He was awaiting sentencing after being found guilty of conspiracy.*

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Cook County Bastille, Cell No. 29,  
Chicago, August 20, 1886.

My Darling Wife:

Our verdict this morning cheers the hearts of tyrants throughout the world.

There was no evidence that any one of the eight doomed men knew of, or advised, or **abetted** the Haymarket tragedy. But what does that matter? The privileged class demands a victim, and we are offered a sacrifice to **appease** the hungry yells of an infuriated mob of millionaires who will be contented with nothing less than our lives. Monopoly triumphs!

Well, my poor, dear wife, I, personally, feel sorry for you and the helpless little babes.

My children—well, their father had better die in the effort to secure their liberty and happiness than live contented in a society which condemns nine-tenths of its children to a life of wage-slavery and poverty. Bless them; I love them unspeakably, my poor helpless little ones.

Ah, wife, living or dead, we are as one. For you my affection is everlasting. For the people, humanity. I cry out again and again in the doomed victim's cell: Liberty! Justice! Equality!

**Source:** *Personal letter, Albert Parsons, August 20, 1886.*

### Vocabulary

abetted: encouraged or supported  
appease: calm or satisfy

## Document F: Chicago Mayor (Modified)

When I judged that Mr. Parsons was about to end his speech I went over to the station, spoke to Captain Bonfield and decided to go home, but instead of going immediately I went back to hear a little more; stayed there about five minutes longer and then left. Within about twenty minutes from the time that I left the meeting I heard the sound of the explosion of the bomb at my house. . . .

I did in fact take no action at the meeting about **dispersing** it. There were occasional replies from the audience as “shoot him,” “hang him,” or the like, but I do not think from the directions in which they came, here and there and around, that there were more than two or three hundred actual sympathizers with the speakers. Several times cries of “hang him,” would come from a boy in the outskirts, and the crowd would laugh. I felt that a majority of the crowd were idle spectators, and the replies nearly as much what might be called “**guying**” as absolute applause. Some of the replies were evidently bitter; they came from immediately around the stand. The audience numbered from 800 to 1,000. . . . There was no suggestion made by either of the speakers for the immediate use of force or violence toward any person that night; if there had been I should have dispersed them at once. When I went to the station during Parsons's speech, I stated to Captain Bonfield that I thought the speeches were about over; that nothing had occurred yet or looked likely to occur to require interference, and that he had better issue orders to the police at the other stations to go home. I don't remember hearing Parsons call “To arms! To arms! To arms!”

**Source:** Mayor Harrison of Chicago attended the Haymarket Rally but left right before the violence erupted. He gave his testimony at the trial on August 2, 1886.

### Vocabulary

dispersing: scattering; breaking up  
guying: teasing; ridiculing

## Guiding Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Document A

1. What words does Parsons use to describe the workers and their needs? How do these words make the workers sound? Why do you think he chose these words?
2. Parsons says, "We wish to get at it by degrees." Does this statement make him seem more radical or more moderate?
3. When was this document written? How many years before the Haymarket incident? Do you think it's a reliable account of Parsons's beliefs?

### Document B

4. How does Parsons define anarchism? Does it sound like a positive or negative thing? Who might disagree with this characterization of anarchism?
5. When was this written? Was it before or after the Haymarket incident?
6. What was Parsons's purpose in writing this document?

### Document C

7. According to Parsons, is dynamite a positive or negative thing? Why?
8. How might Parsons's opinion of dynamite affect what people thought about him?

### Document D

9. According to Detective Cosgrove, what was the effect of Parsons's speech?
10. Do you think this is a reliable account of Parsons's speech? Why or why not?

### Document E

11. According to Parsons, why are he and the other defendants being tried?
12. What does Parsons mean when he claims "monopoly triumphs"?
13. Based on this letter, how would you describe Parsons?

### Document F

14. Was Mayor Harrison afraid of Parsons when he heard him speak? How do you know?
15. How does the Mayor's account differ from Detective Cosgrove's account in Document D? Which do you find more reliable, Document D or F?

# Structured Academic Controversy: Albert Parsons and the Haymarket Riot

Albert Parsons was the most famous man arrested after the Haymarket Riot. He was hanged on November 11, 1887. *Your job is to determine whether you think he was a dangerous man or not.*

During today's class, you will work in teams to discuss arguments convicting and defending Albert Parsons. Your goals for today should include looking at all the issues, seeing both sides, and finding common ground.

## SAC QUESTION

During the SAC, you and your group will try to answer the following question:

**Was Albert Parsons a dangerous man?**

**Team A will argue:** YES, Albert Parsons was a dangerous man.

**Team B will argue:** NO, Albert Parsons was not a dangerous man.

## EVIDENCE

As you develop your arguments for the SAC, use as much evidence as you can.

## PROCEDURE

**30 minutes** With your teammate, read the documents in the Haymarket document set. Find four pieces of evidence which support your side.

**10 minutes** Team A presents. BOTH PARTNERS MUST PRESENT!!!  
Team B writes down Team A's arguments and then repeats them back to Team A.

**10 minutes** Team B presents. BOTH PARTNERS MUST PRESENT!!!  
Team A down arguments of Team B and then repeats them back to Team B.

**10 minutes** Everyone **CAN ABANDON** their positions. Group of 4 attempts to develop a consensus.

## ORGANIZING THE EVIDENCE

Name \_\_\_\_\_

*Use this space to write your main points and the main points made by the other side.*

**Albert Parsons was a dangerous man:** List 4 main points/evidence that support this side.

1) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

2) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

3) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

4) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

**Albert Parsons was not a dangerous man:** List 4 main points/evidence that support this side.

1) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

2) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

3) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

4) From Document \_\_\_\_\_:

## Coming to Consensus

STARTING NOW, YOU MAY ABANDON YOUR ASSIGNED POSITION AND ARGUE FOR EITHER SIDE.

Use the space below to outline your group's agreement. Your agreement should address evidence and arguments from both sides.