

Ella May and the Loray Mill Strike

“Martyred labor heroes like Wiggins are the great ‘disappeared’ in most U.S. history books because they all too clearly demonstrate the dark underside of class in the American story. Many would rather that part of the story never be told.”

Joe Atkins, Labor South

Overview

Ella May (also known by her married name, Ella May-Wiggins) was part of a generation of hopeful Appalachians who left the mountains for the North Carolina mills in search of a better life. Yet, despite her persistence, fortitude and strong work ethic, she struggled to provide for herself and her family due to low wages, long hours, and excruciating working conditions. By 1929, twenty-eight-year-old Ella was a single mother who had lost four of her nine children to poverty. After settling in a predominately African American community called Stumptown in Gaston County, and working seventy-two hours a week on the night shift at American Mill No. 2 in Bessemer City, Ella turned to the National Textile Workers’ Union, who were organizing a strike at the nearby Loray Mill, as her last hope for survival. This lesson explores the tenacious life of Ella May, the conditions she fought against, and her subsequent murder at only age 29 for organizing Black and white millworkers in fighting for a 40-hour week and living wages. Students will examine this history through primary source documents, reading and discussion, ultimately gaining an understanding of this history, its impact, and its relevance today.

Grades

8+

Materials

- Accompanying Power Point, available in the [Database of K-12 Resources](#) (in PDF format) [here](#)
 - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
 - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- “The Mill Mother’s Lament”, lyrics attached and recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jla00AsteD4>
- Oral history excerpt from Millie and Charlotte Wiggins (1984), daughters of Ella May-Wiggins, available [here](#)
 - TEACHER NOTE: Prepare students for the fact that they will hear the interviewee use the term “colored” when referring to Black people in the second clip. During Ella’s lifetime, this was a socially acceptable term, even though today proper terminology is African American, Black, or People of Color. It’s important teachers have a conversation about respectful language/vocabulary before playing the clip.
 - The full interview (from Wilson’s Southern Historical Collection) is available at <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/05618>
- Quotes for Discussion Stations, attached
- The Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia, article from Our State available at <https://www.ourstate.com/loray-mill-strike/> and attached
- Optional teacher resources:
 - More Than a Millworker: Ella May & the Loray Mill Strike – View a recording of this virtual program by Carolina K-12 on our YouTube playlist [here](#).
 - NPR program on the history and future of North Carolina’s labor movements (includes a descendent of Ella May) available [here](#)
 - [NPR Interview with Wiley Cash about the Loray Mill Strike](#)

Duration

45-60 minutes

Preparation

Copy and post the attached seven quotes around the room for “Discussion Stations” prior to class.

Procedure**Warm Up: Image Outside of Loray Mill**

1. Project the image on SLIDE 2 of the accompanying PPT and as a warm up, instruct students to jot down thoughts and/or discuss as a class as you pose questions such as:
 - What do you see? What first catches your eye in this image?
 - What focal point do you think the photographer had in mind? What is in the background?
 - What do you think is happening in this image and why?
 - How do you think the various people pictured are feeling and why?
 - From when and where might this image be from? What evidence makes you think this?

Introduction to Loray Mill

2. Let students know that this image was taken in 1929 outside of the Loray Mill – a cotton mill located in Gastonia, NC. Ask students to share anything that they can regarding what was happening throughout North Carolina, the US, and/or the world during this time period. Also ask students to share anything they know about mill work in North Carolina at this time. Project the image of Loray on SLIDE 3 and provide some basic background about Loray Mill, such as:

As the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth, Gaston County and the rest of the North Carolina Piedmont were transformed. A regional economy based on agriculture shifted to textile manufacturing, and people moved from rural communities to work in the mills and live in the villages that surrounded them. While part of this overall pattern, the Loray Mill also stood out. Situated west of downtown Gastonia, it was the largest mill in North Carolina when it opened in 1902.

The village surrounding the Loray filled with workers who had migrated from the rural farmsteads and mountains of North Carolina and elsewhere in the South. Designed to keep workers close to their jobs, the mill village also offered residents an opportunity to re-create the communities they had left behind. They had backyard gardens and kept livestock, and they built businesses selling food, clothing, furniture, and music. From tiny houses built by mill owners, the village expanded through the establishment of churches, baseball teams and social connections. (Source: <http://loraydigital.prospect.unc.edu/timelines/building-the-mill/>)

As an example of village progress, project/discuss SLIDE 4, which shows a clip from a newspaper about Loray’s opening of a school in 1902. (Additional primary source documents to share can be found [here](#).)

“The Mill Mother’s Lament”

3. Ask students if they have any ideas how the situation at Loray went from this narrative of progress, to the scene pictured in the warm up image. As students offer hypotheses, let students know they are going to listen to (and read) the lyrics of a song, “[The Mill Mother’s Lament](#),” which is directly related to the image, was written by a worker at Loray Mill, and will provide clues regarding what is taking place. Provide students with the attached lyrics and have them write down the main inequalities the author of the song, Ella May (also known by her married name, Ella May-Wiggins), addresses. Also have students answer the following questions after listening to the song (available on SLIDE 5):
 - According to Ella, what problems exist with working in Loray Mill?
 - How are these problems impacting workers’ lives, particularly the lives of working mothers?

- What picture of mill work does this song paint overall?
- What do you think Ella May's purpose was in writing this song? What did she hope to accomplish? (Make sure students not only discuss a higher wage, but also the mention of unionizing.)
- What risks did Ella take by writing this song?
- Why do you think Ella is calling for a union? What do you already know about unions?
- How might the mill owners respond to this song?
- What connection do you think this song and the sentiments express have to the warm up image?

“Stretch Out” to Strike

4. How then did things at Loray transition from a progressive way of life and bustling mill community, to the issues addressed in Ella May's song and finally to the violence pictured in the warm up image?

Let students know that Ella May was a mill worker at American Mill 2 in Bessemer City, NC. The conditions she, like workers in mill's across North Carolina, were excruciating. Explain that in 1928 the owners of Loray Mill, the Manville-Jenckes company, which was located in nearby Gastonia, hired a firm to evaluate work at Loray. Project [SLIDE 6](#) and explain that the resulting report implemented changes throughout the mill, starting with a so-called “stretchout” where fewer workers had to operate more machines. ([Source](#)) Spinners and weavers had to double their work, while also having their wages reduced. The insistence of mill owners to keep prices down also caused mill work to become extremely dangerous and dirty. Often the workdays were so long that the women, who made up a considerable percentage of the workers, were rarely home to raise their children. Upon hearing about such conditions in the Loray Mill, Fred Erwin Beal of the [National Textile Workers Union](#) (NTWU), as well as a member of the [Trade Union Unity League](#), began focusing his attention on the small town of Gastonia and nearby areas.

5. Tell students that they are going to listen to a two-minute excerpt from an oral history interview with two of Ella May's (the person who wrote the song, and who was also a mill worker at the time) daughters. Play [this oral history excerpt](#) starting at the beginning and stopping at minute 2:08 (at “smarter than the rest of us.”) As students listen, tell them to jot down every clue they hear about life for Ella and her children in 1929 North Carolina. After, project [SLIDE 7](#), which contains a photo of Ella's children, and discuss student observations along with the segment as a class. Tell students that they are going to learn about worker experiences at Loray through the words of people who once lived and worked there.

Discussion Stations: Primary Sources Regarding Work at Loray

6. Prior to class, teachers will have ideally printed and posted the attached seven quotes around the room at seven different stations, one quote at each. Place students into seven groups (or for larger classrooms seeking smaller groups, teachers can create multiple stations with the same quote.) Students should divide a piece of notebook paper into seven rows and then travel around the room to the various stations (or to as many stations as a teacher choosing pending time) and discuss the following questions, taking notes at each station as they do so. Let students know that all excerpts are from oral history interviews with workers at Loray Mill. (These questions can also be projected via [SLIDE 8](#).) Teachers can allow anywhere from 3-5 minutes per station.
 - What did you learn about working at Loray Mill based on this quote?
 - What might you infer this person wants?
 - What additional questions do you have based on this excerpt in general, and/or what questions would you like to ask this particular mill worker?
 - How do you think a mill owner may have responded and why?
7. Once students have visited the pre-determined amount of stations, bring students back together for a class debrief of each quote. Have a student read each quote aloud then students should offer their group's observations and thoughts. After discussing all quotes, ask students to consider:

- Based on this information, how do you think these people, as well as Ella May, responded when Fred Beal of the [National Textile Workers Union](#) (NTWU), and member of the [Trade Union Unity League](#), showed up in town talking about a strike? What would these workers have to gain? What might they have to lose?
8. Let students know that on Saturday, March 30, 1929, the union held its first public meeting in Gastonia. [Ellen Dawson](#), co-director of the strike and vice president of the NTWU, urged workers to stand resolute. The "seemingly frail" woman was in fact a "tough, experienced organizer and superb stump speaker." At 3 pm, Beal took a vote and the workers voted unanimously to strike. ([Source](#)) Finally, let students know that the warm up image they viewed is a woman trying to stop the National Guard, who was called in to manage the Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia, NC in 1929. Ask students to consider how this information changes (or doesn't change) their interpretation of the image and discuss further.
 9. To finally allow students to piece together the entire story, have them read (either independently or in reading partners) *The Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia*, an article from Our State available at <https://www.ourstate.com/loray-mill-strike/> (text also attached.) Corresponding questions for students to discuss and answer are included. After students have read, discuss as an entire class.
 - In what ways were Loray Mill workers being treated unfairly?
 - What choices did workers have in defending themselves? What risks came with the various choices?
 - Why does the article say that mill owners "power was all encompassing?"
 - Describe Ella May. Why do you think she chose to get involved in the Union and strike?
 - Based on what you read, how might one argue that 1.) the strikers were responsible for the violence that occurred and 2.) the antistrikers were responsible for the violence that occurred? In your opinion, who is actually responsible and what evidence makes you think this?
 - The article noted that many strikers later blamed the Union for how they ended up, without work and destitute. Do you think this is a fair view? In your opinion, who or what was to blame?
 - Why do you think people in Gastonia wanted "to forget" what had occurred?
 10. Return to the oral history excerpt with Millie and Charlotte Wiggins (1984), daughters of Ella May-Wiggins, available [here](#), and play the remaining five minutes (starting at minute 2:10 until the end.) In this excerpt Ella May's daughters discuss her murder. Ask students to again take note of additional information they learn about Ella, her involvement in the strike, the danger of her involvement, and why it cost her her life.
 - Why do you think mill owners and even some mill workers were so against the concept of a union?
 - In what ways did Ella not only resist what she believed were unjust working conditions, but also societal "expectations" of the time?
- **TEACHER NOTE:** Prepare students for the fact that they will hear the interviewee use the term "colored" when referring to Black people. At the time of her childhood, this was a socially acceptable term, even though today proper terminology is African American, Black, or People of Color. Its important teachers have a conversation about respectful language/vocabulary before playing the clip.

Context of the Time: Jim Crow in North Carolina

11. As students discuss the oral history clip, take some time to put Ella May and the Loray Strike in the context of the time. In 1929, Jim Crow laws and expectations were in effect. (For a detailed lesson on Jim Crow, see Carolina K-12's lesson, [Jim Crow in North Carolina](#).) Ella and her family, who were white, rented a dilapidated home in an African-American neighborhood called Stumptown. Though it was uncommon in the world of Jim Crow, Wiggins developed friendships with her neighbors in a time when it was socially unacceptable. During her involvement with the union, she not only stood up for workers but also crossed the racial divide and recruited African Americans for the union, despite a debate among union leadership as to whether the union should be integrated. She was said to have "stepped over a rope separating African American and white workers at a union meeting and sat with the African Americans" during one

meeting, symbolic of her views regarding uniting. With her help, the NTWU voted to allow African Americans to join the union. However, her outspoken advocacy ultimately cost her life. Discuss:

- Why, and how, do you think this history should be remembered? What lessons are to be learned? In what ways are these lessons still relevant today?
- Teachers may want to integrate a conversation regarding issues of labor in North Carolina today. A good source to listen to is NPR's interview regarding unions and organized labor available [here](#). (The program discusses Ella May and the Loray Mill and brings in connections to current day events.)

12. As a culminating activity, instruct students to consider all the various ways Ella and mill workers at Loray could and/or did resist, and then use this information to create a protest flyer, poster or banner that is designed as if it is from 1929 and contains historically accurate information. (Examples related to this actual history are available on SLIDES 9 & 10.) Once student work is complete, hang final products around the classroom and have students do a gallery walk where they are each given three or more Post It Notes; they should write feedback on each Post It and leave it by different work.

13. As a closing discussion, have students debrief the protest materials they viewed, sharing which ones would most propel them to action and why. Further discuss:

- How would a mill owner respond to these materials? How might a worker who was antistrike respond?
- Would you consider the Loray Mill strike ultimately successful or a failure and why?
- What would you say the lasting impact of the strike was?
- Even though it was unsuccessful in attaining its goals of better working conditions and wages, why was it important? What lessons should have been learned?
 - Encourage students to consider that even though the strike was considered successful in a more long-term and lasting way in that it caused an immense controversy, giving the labor movement momentum and propelling the movement in its national development.
- In what ways does our nation still grapple with similar issues of workers right today?

Lyrics for "Mill Mother's Lament"

Lyrics by Ella Mae Wiggins, performed by Pete Seeger

We leave our homes in the morning
We kiss our children goodbye
While we slave for the bosses
Our children scream and cry
And when we draw our money
Our grocery bills to pay
Not a cent to spend for clothing
Not a cent to lay away
And on that very evening
Our little son will say
I need some shoes mother
And so does sister May
How it grieves the heart of a mother
You everyone must know
But we can't buy for our children
Our wages are too low
It is for our little children
That seem to us so dear
But for us nor them dear workers
The bosses do not care
But understand all workers
Our union they do fear
Let's stand together
And have a union here

Quotes for Discussion Stations

Quote #1:

"I never made no more than nine dollars a week, and you can't do for a family on such money. I'm the mother of nine. Four died with the whooping cough. I was working nights. . . . So I had to quit, and then there wasn't no money for medicine, and they just died. I couldn't do for my children any more than you women on the money we git. That's why I come out for the union, and why we all got to stand for the union, so's we can do better for our children, and they won't have lives like we got." – Ella May Wiggins

Quote #2

"Back then you had a lot of water in the weave room. [...] It was wet in that back alley. There was a loom fixer taking a loom down one time, and he slipped and grabbed at the beam on the rail, and the beam probably weighted two hundred and fifty pounds, maybe more. It was above him, and it fell on him and killed him." – Mack Duncan

Quote #3

"[Mill work was] nothing but a robot life. Robot-ing is my word for it – in the mill you do the same thing over and over again – just like on a treadmill. There's no challenge to it – just drudgery. The more you do, the more they want done." – Chester Copeland, Orange County

Quote #4

"They [efficiency experts hired by the mill owners] got a stopwatch, and they followed them around. They figured out exactly how long it took you to tie that thread and start the loom up. They figured it right down to the tick of that stopwatch. They expected you to stretch it out a little bit, to do a little more. You couldn't please them. Give you more work for no more pay." – Sam Finley

Quote #5

"[Working in the mills was] "like taking orders in the armed forces. You was kind of under a fear, see, because there was nobody you could take your troubles to. You couldn't carry it high because [an overseer's] word went above yours regardless. If he's over you, he's over you. It was pretty well all the way down the line. You had to take it or lose your job." – Grover Hardin

Quote #6

"Then they Forced me out of the house I was Living in I had no other place to go.... I have tried over 300 cotton mills for work and they will not hire me because I belong to the union... There is Starvation ahead if i don't get work at once.... Please for God's Sake help me get work." – BE Brookshire. Williamson, South Carolina

Quote #7

"We were making \$30 to \$35 a week and were running six to eight looms. Now we are running ten to twelve looms and are getting \$15 to \$18 a week. We can't live on it. All we are asking is simple justice. A weaver cannot run ten or twelve looms at nay price. It is more than a man can stand let alone a woman. There used to be women weavers in the mill but when the number of looms was increased the women all had to give up the work." – Statement from Loray Mill Weavers, 1928

Name: _____

The Loray Mill Strike in Gastonia

written by Chuck McShane

<https://www.ourstate.com/loray-mill-strike/>

The crowd marches east. Five hundred people carry picket signs and chant union slogans. "To hell with the bosses! Come on the line! Stick together and win this time!" Behind the strikers, the late afternoon sun casts shadows off the towers of the Loray Mill. On Gastonia's main street, 50 police officers wait with bayonets and blackjacks and orders to break up the "illegal parade." As the crowd moves closer, the officers charge, brandishing fists, rifle butts, and bayonets. They slice through the mass of people, throwing whomever they can collar into waiting paddy wagons. The commotion confuses 50-year-old Ada Howell. She isn't part of the crowd; she's just out looking for dinner on this day, April 22, 1929. So when an officer tells her to get moving, she stares at him blankly. With his fists and bayonet, the officer strikes Howell, leaving her with two black eyes and a bloodied dress. Lawyers for the textile union tell her to keep the dress for evidence. But she has to wash it, she says. It is her only dress. Three weeks into a strike at the Loray Mill and tension has boiled over into violence. What comes next, though, makes this night seem tame.

Mill-town power

At Loray Mill, the hours are long, the pay is low, and the pace of work is monitored by sharp-eyed supervisors.

The movement begins with the stretch-out, the term workers use for the combination of layoffs and working at a faster pace for less pay. While the rest of the economy roars into the 1920s, Southern textiles take a beating. The end of World War I means less need for uniforms. New fashions mean women want shorter skirts. Demand for fabric plummets. Mill owners tighten control over their workers. Supervisors time each task and install "hank clocks" on looms and weaving machines, forcing a quicker pace for each worker.

The stretch-out stretches the workers thin. Gone are the relaxed conversations over the din of the looms, the breaks for baseball games, and the quick runs home to tuck in the children. Twelve-hour shifts become harried affairs — a rush from one machine to the next under the unrelenting tick of the clocks.

At Loray, supervisor G.A. Johnstone cuts staff from 3,500 to 2,200 and slashes pay by as much as 50 percent. The workers so hate Johnstone that when Loray replaces him in August 1928, crowds of workers hold a party in his front yard, shooting off firecrackers until the sheriff comes to break it up. The celebration is empty, though; the new supervisor changes nothing.

Standing up to the boss isn't easy in a Southern textile town. Workers have held organized strikes before, but the mill owners' power is all-encompassing: They own the houses workers sleep in, pay the policemen who patrol the village, and appoint the preachers at mill-town churches. And the owners — often locals — keep a close watch on their workers.

Loray is different. It is a Yankee mill. More than half the money raised for its construction in 1900 came from New York, and now a Rhode Island company, Manville Jenckes, holds the deed. And Loray is big, with five floors and 600,000 square feet. The company-owned village is home to 5,000, making it harder for the bosses to keep track of workers' activities.

So when the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) comes south, they come to Gastonia first. Fred Beal, a baby-faced 33-year-old who has spent the last 20 years working in New England mills, leads the charge. He arrives in late March and immediately starts signing people up for the union. When the mill fires union members on April 1, the workers walk to the NTWU's makeshift headquarters on Franklin Avenue. By shift-

change time, a crowd of 1,000 has gathered. Beal calls for a strike vote. It passes — unanimously. Their demands: a 40-hour workweek, a minimum \$20-a-week wage, equal pay for men and women, recognition of the union, and, as one of their placards that day declares: *To Hell with the Hank Clock*.

Strike opponents feel as though they're under siege. They see the strikers as troublemakers. The union members are outsiders. The fact that the union has Communist ties only heightens the tension. Send "those wops from the east side of New York" home, a letter to the *Gastonia Daily Gazette* shrieks. Gov. O. Max Gardner, a mill owner himself, calls in the National Guard.

But the strikers remain steadfast on the picket lines, especially the women. They taunt the National Guardsmen, calling them "Boy Scouts" and "Nasty Guardsmen." Some even grab the ends of their guns. And while flapper style is foreign and unaffordable in Gastonia, many women flout tradition in other ways, wearing backward baseball caps and overalls.

Low wages

Ella May Wiggins isn't on the picket lines yet. But she's heard about the strike at Loray and has seen some of the NTWU people coming around her mill in Bessemer City. Like a lot of mill workers, Wiggins came to Gaston County from her mountain home looking for a better life. It doesn't turn out that way. By 28, she's borne nine children. Four of them die of whooping cough. Her husband deserts the family.

Wiggins isn't one to follow convention. She's started going by her maiden name again and moves in with a lover, Charlie Shope, who is rumored to be the father of her ninth child. Instead of the mill village, she lives in Bessemer City's predominately black Stumptown neighborhood, in a time of strict racial segregation.

When the NTWU comes to her mill, Wiggins is one of the first to walk out. She throws herself into work for the union, becoming their bookkeeper. She even travels to Washington, D.C., where she confronts Sen. Lee Overman in the Capitol. But she is best known for her songs. She sets new words to the melodies of well-known mountain ballads. Her most famous, "Mill Mother's Lament," connects with the workers' hearts in a way no union rhetoric can.

*How it grieves the heart of a mother,
You everyone must know
But we can't buy for our children
Our wages are too low.*

Police state

June 7 is payday at Loray. The strike has languished since May, when mill owners started evicting strikers from the mill village. The union sets up a tent colony nearby, but supplies are running low, and many workers return to the mill. With a paycheck to hold them over, many workers are prepared for another dramatic walkout. At evening shift change, the women of the tent colony march to the mill and convince the night-shift workers to abandon their looms. The deputies stop the 150 women and children cold, and they scatter back to their tents.

Later that night, Police Chief Orville Aderholt and four other officers come to the tent city to investigate reports of a disturbance. Four armed strikers stop them and demand that the officers show a search warrant or leave. Shots ring out. Within minutes, Aderholt, three of the four deputies, and one of the four strikers are shot. Aderholt dies the next morning.

Gastonia becomes a police state overnight. Deputies ransack the tent colony. People are suspicious of outsiders. Doctors tell a passer-through from New Jersey who has stopped for a checkup to keep moving.

More than 60 people are arrested that night. Historical accounts vary on how many people are charged with murder — some sources say 14, others 15; another nine are charged with assault with a deadly weapon.

The details of the shooting remain uncertain. Some claim that Beal gave the strikers orders to shoot. “Do your duty,” they quote Beal as saying before the bullet ripped into the chief’s back. None of the policemen can identify who fired the deadly bullet. The strikers say they had shot in self-defense, and that the bullet that killed the chief came from an officer who had not been injured.

Too late

The caravan — 105 cars deep and led by a motorcycle policeman — speeds through Gastonia traffic lights on September 9. The passengers wave American flags and honk their horns, making straight for the NTWU headquarters. The law has just declared a mistrial in Aderholt’s murder trial. And though a second trial is scheduled for later in the month, members of the Committee of One Hundred — the name given to the antistrike group — think it’s time to take matters into their own hands.

They ransack union headquarters and head to a union boardinghouse. Singing hymns, they drag three organizers down the stairs, wrap them in American flags, and stuff them into a car. In the woods outside of Concord, the group starts beating a striker. A couple of farmers out opossum hunting break up the fight, sending the dazed and wounded union members scrambling to the train station. Three days later, state police arrest 14 people for the crime. The Loray Mill posts each suspect’s \$1,000 bond.

Not wanting to back down, the NTWU and the Communist Party announce plans for a mass rally in South Gastonia on September 14. But party leaders hear reports of larger and angrier antistrike crowds. One antistrike worker at Loray later testifies that a mill security officer handed him a gun and 20 bullets that morning, telling him to “do everything necessary to break up the union meeting.” At the last minute, NTWU calls off the rally. But it is too late.

Murder

Over in Bessemer City, a couple dozen strikers haven’t heard the news. Wiggins is preparing to sing at the rally. Her group piles into the bed of a hired truck and heads toward Gastonia. Before they can get there, though, a band of men tells them to return to Bessemer City.

The driver turns around, but as he drives away, several cars follow him closely, and then cut him off. He slams into the back of one of the cars, sending many in the group flying onto the highway. That’s when the shooting starts. A bullet slices through Wiggins and lodges into her spine as she stands in the truck bed. She dies in Charlie Shope’s arms.

Some jailed, some free

The strike never recovers from Wiggins’s death. Less than two weeks later, the union abandons Loray, telling the remaining tent colony residents to move on. A Baptist minister presides over Wiggins’s funeral, and her surviving children move into the Presbyterian orphanage at Barium Springs.

The jury takes less than an hour to return guilty verdicts for seven of the original 16 strikers charged with Chief Aderholt’s murder. While evidence favors the defense, one witness’s profession of atheism costs them. In closing arguments, prosecutors call the defendants a “traitorous crowd, coming from hell.” Beal’s sentence is 17 to 20 years. Meanwhile, in Concord, it takes 45 minutes for the jury to acquit the men accused of beating the strikers.

By November, Horace Wheelus emerges as the main suspect in Wiggins's death. Loray Mill pays his \$5,000 bond. He and four others face trial in February. Several witnesses, including Charlie Shope, place Wheelus at the scene. Shope testifies in the same bloody shirt he was wearing the day of the shooting. In the end, the jury takes less than 30 minutes to acquit Wheelus and the others. No one else is ever charged.

Forget and move on

With the union gone and the strikers blacklisted from working at local mills, many grow destitute. Even the *Daily Gazette* takes pity, offering Christmas turkeys and a few presents to some that year. Some strikers move back to the farms or to mills in other states, out of reach of the blacklists. Many of the remaining Gaston County workers blame the union. When the NTWU tries to organize a strike at a Bessemer City mill in 1930, the workers run them out of town, twice.

The strike inspires six novels in the coming few years. In Gastonia, though, it seems people want to forget. Filmmakers hoping to make a documentary about the strike in the 1980s have trouble finding willing interviewees. In 1986, a proposal to create a historical marker is still controversial. Some want the marker to ignore the deaths and mark the site where "local citizens defeated the first Communist efforts to control southern textiles."

In April 2013, the North Carolina Office of Archives and History unveils the marker commemorating the event. It's taken 27 years to approve 21 words: "A strike in 1929 at the Loray Mill, 200 yards S., left two dead and spurred opposition to labor unions statewide."

Answer:

1. In what ways were Loray Mill workers being treated unfairly?
2. What choices did workers have in defending themselves? What risks came with the various choices?
3. Why does the article say that mill owners "power was all encompassing?"
4. Describe Ella Mae Wiggins. Why do you think she chose to get involved in the Union and strike?
5. Based on what you read, how might one argue that 1.) the strikers were responsible for the violence that occurred and 2.) the strikebreakers were responsible for the violence that occurred? In your opinion, who is actually responsible and what evidence makes you think this?
6. The article noted that many strikers later blamed the Union for how they ended up, without work and destitute. Do you think this is a fair view? In your opinion, who or what was to blame?
7. Why do you think people in Gastonia wanted "to forget" what had occurred?
8. Why, and how, do you think this history should be remembered? What lessons are to be learned? In what ways are these lessons still relevant today?