

# Child Labor in Maryland: An Historical Investigation

**Grade Level: High School United States History**

**Time Required: 1-2 Class Periods**



## **U.S. History Voluntary State Curriculum:**

- 5.2.1.a Examine the impact of the muckrakers of the Progressive Movement on child labor reform, workplace conditions, and government reforms such as the creation of the Department of Labor and the Department of Commerce
- 5.2.1.k Describe the positive and negative impact of the Progressive Era

## **Government Voluntary State Curriculum:**

- 1.1.A.c Analyze the decisions made by the government on domestic issues and their effect on society, such as entitlements, socio-economic status, individuals with disabilities, welfare reform
- 1.1.B.d Evaluate the influence of the media, special interest groups, lobbyists, Political Action Committees (PACs), and public opinion on government policies
- 4.1.1.b Explain how governments attempt to prioritize socio-economic goals in response to changing economic, social, and political conditions
- 4.1.1.g Analyze the effectiveness of government policies in achieving the nation's socio-economic goals using cost-benefit analysis

## I. Engage the Students

Read the following excerpts about contemporary child labor situations and then pose, for class discussion, the two questions that follow.

*On the twelfth floor of a building at Thirty-ninth street in the heart of the garment district in New York City a fifteen year old boy "could be found by his table...sewing pleats into cheap white chiffon skirts. He hopes to make \$1.00 an hour...The temperature inside is eight degrees. Fluffy blue ear muffs frame his Mexican immigrant's face, and he wears a thin jacket, slacks, scuffed loafers and a scared look. 'I can't lose my job', he pleads... to an inspector from the State department of labor. 'We have no money.'*

*January 1989, Sweatshops in New York City, General Accounting Office Publication.*

*A fourteen-year-old batboy for the Class A Savannah Cardinals baseball team was fired after the United States Department of Labor said that his employment violated child-labor laws which state that fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds must not work past seven p.m. on school nights or nine p.m. during the summer. In his review of the decision, Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich termed the application of child-labor laws to batboys "silly," and stated that the department would not enforce any hourly violations in organized baseball pending a review of the law.*

*May 28, 1993, New York Times.*

- 1. Why does the United States government regulate the work of children?**
- 2. Does the government have the right to create these regulations? Why or why not?**

**Narrative:** Read the narrative to the class, stressing the focus question at the end.

After the Civil War conditions in the United States combined to create an industrial boom. Large factories, which had existed only in the textile industry before the Civil War, became common in a variety of industries. Many owners, looking for the cheapest source of labor available, turned to children to staff those factories. In 1900, packing houses in Baltimore paid men \$2 a day, but paid children \$.85 a day. They liked to employ children not only for the fact that they earned lower wages, but also because their small hands and bodies made them more adept at handling small parts and tools and squeezing into small areas. Parents allowed children to work because they needed the wages to support the family. Children were seen as a large part of the family economy.

Child labor was not new. Children had been used as workers ever since the founding of the United States, but industrialization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century drew more than ever before. The number of children under the age of 15 who worked in industrial jobs for wages climbed from 1.5 million in 1890 to 2 million in 1910.

By the early 1900's, many Americans were beginning to question the use of child laborers. Some even went so far as to call it "child slavery." They argued that long working hours and poor working conditions caused serious health problems as well as deprived children of the opportunity of an education that would allow them to better themselves and their future. These reformers, known as the Progressives, convinced Congress to pass the Keating-Owens Child Labor Act in 1916. This act established a minimum age and maximum hours for child workers. This law did not last long, because the Supreme Court decided that Congress did not have the power to create such a law. Despite this setback, reformers were eventually able to implement child labor laws in most states. By 1920, the number of children in the work force had been cut in half.

Like most other states, Maryland also struggled with the issue of child labor. On the one hand, child workers contributed greatly to Maryland's economy. On the other hand, reformers believed that the lives of child workers were being ruined. In 1906, the Maryland General Assembly passed a law that prohibited children under age 12 from working in factories. The minimum age was later changed to 14.

**Focus Question:**                    **How were Marylanders affected by Progressive efforts to end child labor?**

## II. Conduct the Investigation

In order to answer the question you will examine several documents independently. Analyze each document by answering the following questions on your graphic organizer:

1. How do I know this information is reliable?
2. When was this document written? Who wrote it? What was its purpose?
3. Explain the author's point of view.
4. How can this document help me answer the focus question?

## III. Discussion

Explain to the students that now that the documents have been analyzed, you will have the opportunity to discuss the documents and the focus question with the students in your group. As you discuss interpretations of the documents, cite evidence for your opinions. Multiple interpretations can emerge and may or may not be accepted by all. Write your group responses in the appropriate section of your graphic organizer, "Group Analysis."

## IV. Report the Findings

Once historians complete their research, they formulate a thesis that answers the focus question. You will do the same by writing a summary explaining your conclusions. Your summary should answer the focus question below and be supported with details from the documents.

**Focus Question:**                    **How were Marylanders affected by Progressive efforts to end child labor?**

*Note to teacher:*

- *Guide the students by identifying groups of Marylanders they should be thinking about such as: child workers, families of child workers, employers of child workers, consumers of goods produced by child workers, educators, store owners in towns where child workers lived.*
- *Focus them to think about the short and long term economic consequences of the restrictions placed on child labor.*

## V. Closure/ Lesson Extension

Lead students in a discussion of the following question:  
Parents could work with their children on farms but could not send them elsewhere. Why?

**The Child Labor Situation in Maryland**  
***Charities 14 (Sept. 16, 1905)***

The Maryland Bureau of Statistics and Information has just published a special report made in conjunction with the Consumers League. This investigation was for the purpose of discovering the extent of child labor in Baltimore, and the advisability of urging better legislation for its restriction.

The places investigated were divided into the following groups, and while but little of the field was covered, the report brings out the fact that the child labor and compulsory education laws of Maryland are so defective that a comprehensive estimate of the extent and effects of child labor at this time would be impossible:

Group I -- Shirt factories, shirtwaist and clothing establishments.

Group II -- Cigars, tobacco, cigarettes and snuff.

Group III -- Bakeries, candy manufacturers and confectioners.

Group IV -- Manufacturers of tin and metal goods of all kinds, including buttons, clasps, enameled ware, tin specialties, steel novelties and tin boxes and cans.

Group V -- Department stores.

Group VI -- Coat pads, artificial flowers, picture frames and moldings, showcases, plain twine and netting, iron foundries, curled hair and bristles, canneries, paper bags, glass bottles and children's dresses.

"One thing is sure," says the report, "and that is that the intelligence and physical appearance of the children in these industries is much below the standard required for ordinarily intelligent or healthy children." Some difficulty was experienced in collecting reliable information, from the fact that the present law does not require employers to admit the inspectors to their factories or to give information. It was found that many of the children employed appeared from ten to twelve years of age and were very ignorant:

In most of these establishments the proprietors or managers refuse to let the investigator go through the factory or converse with the children; therefore

the meagre information gleaned has been secured by questioning of the children coming from work or going to their homes with them and securing some of the information from parents or neighbors. The greatest evil in the employment of children exists in the smaller factories, where only two or three are employed, as these escape the attention of the school attendance officer, and the environment is much worse than that surrounding children in larger factories.

Enough evidence has already been gathered in this special report to justify the awakened interest manifested by the Consumers League, the school authorities, the Charity Organization Society, the social settlements, and other public-spirited citizens in their purpose to cooperate with the Bureau of Statistics for the passage of such child labor laws and such appropriations to the Department of Factory Inspection as shall guarantee an opportunity for physical and educational development to the children of Maryland.

Reprint of *Charities* 14 (Sept. 16, 1905) found at <http://www.boondocksnet.com/labor/>

Document # 2



[http://www.intandem.com/NewPrideSite/MD/Lesson6/Lesson6\\_10.html](http://www.intandem.com/NewPrideSite/MD/Lesson6/Lesson6_10.html)

"Johnnie, a nine year old oyster shucker. Man with hat and pipe is a padrone (locally called a row boss) who had brought these people from Baltimore for four years."  
Photo and caption by Lewis Hine (1909-1911)

Library of Congress

Document # 3

Lessie and her family. They all worked in fields near Baltimore in summer. Northern Anne Arundel County. Photo & Caption by Lewis Hine 1909-1911.

Library of Congress



<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pnp/cph/3b30000/3b38000/3b38100/3b38160r.jpg>

## **US Bureau of Labor, 1911**

In this plant, the place where the tomato skinners worked was a shed-like part of the building on the waterfront, having one side entirely exposed. In dry weather, this feature has an element of comfort, for the workers get much air, though it is tainted by the odors arising from the harbor. In wet weather, the workers were entirely unprotected. Those nearest the outside side of the shed get thoroughly wet. As the shed itself leaks, the workers even on the inside farthest removed from the open waterfront, suffered no little discomfort... In cases of chilly weather, the discomfort must reach a danger point, apparently, for there is no provision for reducing the exposure.

The vat for steaming tomatoes was in the same shed and kept the women and children in a cloud of hot humidity. The floor was covered with a slippery mixture of tomato pulp and skins. Some of the women and children wore rubber boots as they stood at their skinning troughs, some were barefooted, and others wore coarse shoes. The skirts of all the workers were wet, some of them up to the knees...

Men brought supplies of tomatoes from the vats to the skinning tables, but the women and the children carried the 40 pound buckets of skinned tomatoes over the reeking and slippery floor from the skinning shed into the room where the product is weighed, canned, and cooked...

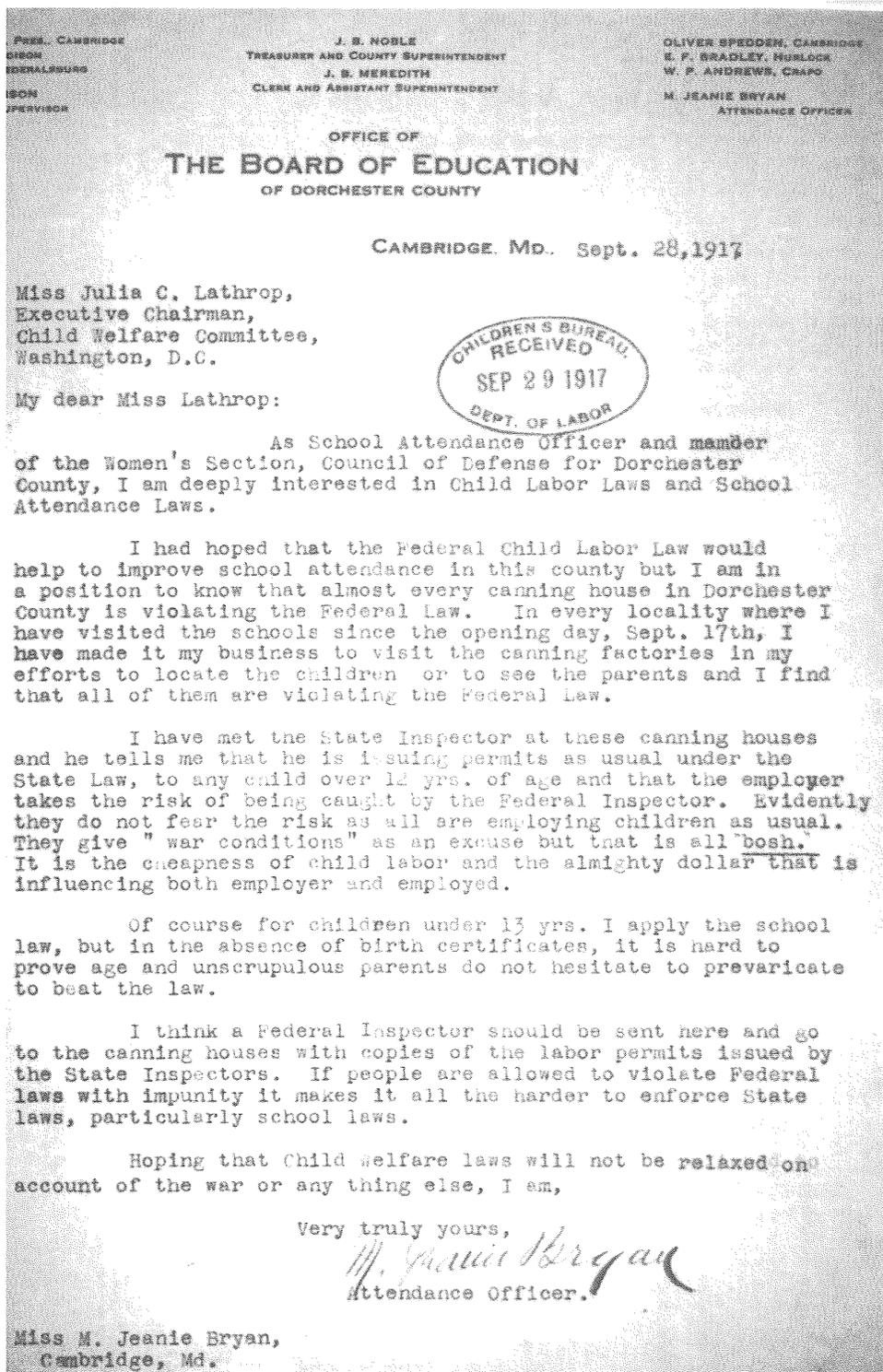
United States Bureau of Labor: Maryland Factories Investigation, 1911

Excerpt can be found at: <http://www.intandem.com/NewPrideSite/MD/Lesson6/Canneries.html>

**Selected State Compulsory School Attendance Laws**

<b>State</b>	<b>Date Enacted</b>	<b>Age Limits</b>
Alabama	1915	7-16
Connecticut	1872	7-16
Delaware	1907	5-16
Maryland	1902	5-16
New York	1874	6-16
Ohio	1877	6-18
Pennsylvania	1895	8-17
Rhode Island	1883	6-16
Virginia	1908	5-18

Source: United States Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics



“Picking crabs was a family thing. All the people that worked here when I started around age seven was family- and that was over fifty years ago. Most of ‘em had about six, seven to twelve kids, and everybody worked together.

When we was coming up, people would say, “ I thought it’s about time they brought you down here.” Because they know that if anyone has a child, they’re looking for them to come down here after they got a certain age. And that’s the way they would take care of the baby-sitters and all the rest. Most of the parents bring ‘em down here, then after they got down here they said, “Well, you’re going to do something.” And, of course a lot of us didn’t like it.”

“I think I was about thirteen when they got really strict, and I had to leave Clayton Company here in Cambridge. I went down the county to another crab house where the inspector didn’t want to make that trip down there. And then at fourteen, I came back here because you just needed a doctor’s certificate to work and they had a company doctor. They might take your pressure or something like that and then say, ‘Okay, you all right to work.’”

Donald Cephas, Claw Cracker

**It’s How You Pick the Crab”: An Oral Portrait of Eastern Shore Crab Picking**

By Kelly Feltault, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, 2001

“If the inspector or somebody came, mom would either make us go out of the crab house, or I can remember at that time they had big cans, big trash cans that they picked in. And if some of ‘em were empty or something, they would probably tell you get down in that can. And you sit down in that can: it was fun then ‘cause you were hiding.”

### **Joyce Fitchett, Crab Picker**

**It’s How You Pick the Crab”: An Oral Portrait of Eastern Shore Crab Picking**  
By Kelly Feltault, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, 2001

## Individual Analysis

	How do I know this is reliable information?	When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?	Explain the author's point of view	How can this document help me answer the focus question?
<b>Document 1</b>				
<b>Document 2</b>				
<b>Document 3</b>				
<b>Document 4</b>				

<b>Document 5</b>				
<b>Document 6</b>				
<b>Document 7</b>				
<b>Document 8</b>				

### Group Analysis

	How do I know this is reliable information?	When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?	Explain the author's point of view	How can this document help me answer the focus question?
<b>Document 1</b>				
<b>Document 2</b>				
<b>Document 3</b>				
<b>Document 4</b>				

<b>Document 5</b>				
<b>Document 6</b>				
<b>Document 7</b>				
<b>Document 8</b>				