

University of North Carolina at Asheville

An Uncivil War:
The New York City Newsboys' Strike of 1899

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By

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More than a thousand newsboys listened in New Irving Hall in New York City, as Mr. Brennan of the newsdealers association of New York City told them, “You have accomplished more in a few days than the newsdealers have been able to do in years.”¹ It was July 25, 1899, and the newsboys of New York City had effectively disrupted nearly all distribution of the *New York World* and the *New York Journal*. The *World*, run by Joseph Pulitzer, and the *Journal*, run by William Randolph Hearst, were in the midst of a battle to gain control of the majority of the newspaper readers in New York City. The rivalry between the two media moguls culminated in the birth of yellow journalism, drove both newspapers to near bankruptcy, and eventually spurred the newsboys strike in the summer of 1899. In an effort to keep costs low to the reader, both Pulitzer and Hearst created a wholesale price increase for the newsboys that forced them to pay 10 cents extra for each 100 newspapers they wished to sell. In response, the newsboys refused, and in doing so, the young news vendors of New York City did what no other newsdealer, or vendor, had done before, and forced Pulitzer and Hearst to comply with their demands.

Specific information surrounding the entirety of the strike is limited. Although Disney released a musical feature film loosely based on the strike entitled *The Newsies*, an emphasis must be placed on the word “loosely.” The general concept of the young men banding together against Pulitzer and Hearst is true. However, the facts, events, and characters are just bits and pieces of the truth scattered about into a family-friendly film for all ages. The embellished plot of the film leaves out integral leaders, switches names, and adds its own villain to increase excitement for viewers. Mix in the hundreds of baby-

¹ “Boys Forsee A Victory,” *New York Tribune*, July 25, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-25/ed-1/seq-1/> (accessed October 3, 2009)

faced, dirt-free boys dancing and singing in the streets of the city to protest the two papers, and the storyline of the film proves to be fantastical. The true leaders and events of the strike were not as musically gifted and friendly as the film would have viewers believe.²

To uncover who these boys were and what really happened, a closer look must be taken on the strike. Two of the few sources which document the strike are David Nasaw's *Children of City – At Work and at Play*, and Susan Bartoletti's *Kids on Strike*. Nasaw illustrates the newsboys strike with articles from multiple newspapers and various primary sources surrounding the events, most notably the street warfare against news wagons in the city.³ Bartoletti offers a more generalized look on the newsboys' lifestyles, and offers a broader, less detailed view on the larger events of the strike and the newsboys' actions.⁴ Although her information is accurate, it lacks enough detail to comprehend how the newsboys planned and won the strike.

Several authors and historians reveal various points on the background events that later created the strike. Historian Marcus Manley Wilkerson explored the first occurrences which led to the strike in *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War; A Study in War Propaganda*. Wilkerson's study delves into the creation of yellow journalism during the Spanish-American War. Wilkerson notes the *Journal* and *World* began writing a "sensational display of news" during the war, and with that the competition between the two grew.⁵ While Wilkerson does elaborate on yellow

² *The Newsies*, produced by Michael Finnell, directed by Kenny Ortega, 121 minutes, Disney, 1992, DVD.

³ David Nasaw, *Children of the City – At Work and at Play* (New York: Anchor Press, 1985), 171

⁴ Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *Kids on Strike!* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 51

⁵ Marcus Manley Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War; A Study in War Propaganda* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 8

journalism and its beginnings, he goes no further into how the new style of journalism maintained the bitter struggle between Pulitzer and Hearst.

Although Wilkerson does not attempt to explain the feud, he lays a foundation other historians have built on to uncover more details on the rivalry. Historian Franklin Luther Mott, in his book, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years*, delivers a focused glimpse of Hearst and Pulitzer's work to build the most popular newspaper in the city. Mott utilizes primary sources from the *Journal* to understand how yellow journalism was born during the Spanish-American War.⁶ Congruent to Mott's work, historian Robert Rutland describes the financial burdens yellow journalism forced upon the papers in *The Newsmongers – Journalism in the Life of the Nation*. Rutland's work supplements Mott's as it shows how the large newspapers struggled to keep headlines attractive to maintain readership after the hostility concluded following the Treaty of Paris from the Spanish-American War.⁷ Historian Dana Lee Thomas presents another dimension to the rise of yellow journalism in *The Media Moguls: From Joseph Pulitzer to William S. Paley*. Thomas reports on the actions of Pulitzer and his personal dealings with yellow journalism, which presents the other side of the clash between the two men.⁸

The new style of journalism created by Pulitzer and Hearst's newspapers eventually led to a head-to-head matchup between the *Journal* and the *World* in 1898.⁹

To recount the major events during his time as managing editor at the *World*, Don Seitz

⁶ Franklin Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years - 1690-1940* (New York: MacMillian Company, 1941), 529

⁷ Robert Rutland, *The Newsmongers – Journalism in the Life of the Nation 1690 – 1972* (New York: Dial Press, 1973), 265

⁸ Dana Lee Thomas, *The Media Moguls: From Joseph Pulitzer to William S. Paley: Their Lives and Boisterous Times* (New York: Putnam, 1981), 87-89

⁹ Thomas, 103

wrote his narrative *Joseph Pulitzer: His Life and Letters*. In Seitz's narrative, the actions taken against one another by the two rivals reveals how the two newspapers battled their way into financial crises.¹⁰ In a constant struggle to beat out their opponent, Pulitzer and Hearst went as far as to steal reporters and staff members from each other in order to gain a better quality paper.¹¹ The scramble to obtain the majority of the readers in New York City became so intense that the *World* was estimated to have lost millions of dollars in the process.¹² Seitz's narrative also allows for one of the closest views of the rivalry between the two newspapers, because he was working directly under Pulitzer. However, Seitz rarely reflects on the newsboys' strike, possibly due to the embarrassment felt by Pulitzer for being defeated by teenagers and children.

Despite a lack of recorded information from historians on the events, the newsboys' strike of 1899 is revealed and fully described in various American newspapers. The articles and reports in these newspapers chronicle the newsboys' strike from the price increase to the ending arbitration deal with Pulitzer and Hearst. Some sources, including Seitz, cannot be fully used to describe the strike due to his conflict of interest, as he was the managing editor for one of the boycotted newspapers. Newspapers not under the ownership of Pulitzer or Hearst proved to be the only median through which the public acquired any factual information or updates on the newsboys' actions in New York City during their two-week campaign against their employers.

Other newspapers from New York City, such as the *New York Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *New York Sun*, produced smaller newspapers than the *World* and *Journal* but assigned large coverage to the strike during the summer of 1899. During the two weeks

¹⁰ Don C. Seitz, *Joseph Pulitzer: His Life and Letters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1924), 215

¹¹ Seitz, 215

¹² Seitz, 218

that local newspapers covered the strike, other regional newspapers from across the United States began to report on the events as well. The strike was consistently covered in the *Marietta Daily Leader* of Marietta, Ohio; *San Francisco Call* of San Francisco, California; *Omaha Daily Bee* of Omaha, Ohio; *Saint Paul Globe* of Saint Paul, Minnesota; and *The Times* of Richmond, Virginia. These regional newspapers, none of which were connected to Pulitzer or Hearst at the time, all presented separate angles to the story, which gave the public a complete view of the daily actions taken by the newsboys. While the information from previous historians lays a blueprint for understanding how and why the strike occurred, the complete story and details of who and what sparked the strike, and how the newsboys eventually won, lies within these primary sources.¹³

Rooted in the birth of yellow journalism, a new breed of reporting which Wilkerson described as “a sensational display of news,” the newsboys’ strike was a direct product of Pulitzer and Hearst’s rivalry.¹⁴ The rivalry, which centered itself around perfecting yellow journalism to gain more readers and boost sales, enthralled the two newspaper giants so much so that they went as far as to buy out reporters from their opponents, steal news from competing sources and even use personal funds to finance their cause.¹⁵ The use of these unethical tactics to gain a majority of the readership became so rampant it even garnered national attention to the issue. The *San Francisco Call* poked fun at the rivalry between the two, stating, “They call it ‘yellow journalism’

¹³ Primary sources cited for this thesis were accessed by the writer via the Chronicling America newspaper article database provided by the United States Library of Congress. As of April 22, 2010 all articles cited herein were available through the database located at <http://www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

¹⁴ Wilkerson, 82

¹⁵ Seitz, 212 & 235, Rutland, 265 & 267

in New York, but from the noise it makes ‘yeller’ would be better.”¹⁶ The *Call*’s humorous nature toward the *Journal* and *World* exposed how the battle between Pulitzer and Hearst was affecting more than just readership in New York City.

The constant push for readership proved a success for both papers, but turned into a loss to the lifestyles of the newsboys of New York City. Such rapid success led to sheer ignorance within the minds and ideas of both Pulitzer and Hearst, ignorance which the newsboys were forced to cope and deal with during their daily lives. Such ignorance is best exemplified in Pulitzer’s effort to constantly defeat the *Journal*. His ambition blinded him as he failed to realize how the price cuts to the readers, increased staff, and the increased circulation would culminate into a large deficit for his paper. Seitz recorded that Pulitzer’s actions during 1897 actually cost the *World* an estimated \$8,000,000 during its battle against the *Journal*.¹⁷ However, Pulitzer was not alone in his money troubles. The *Journal* also dealt with similar monetary burdens to such an extent that they were reportedly losing “\$100,000 a year” and “couldn’t afford to sell the paper for less” to the news vendors.¹⁸ In a financial bind, Nasaw explains how the two rivals both decided the answer to their needs would not come from a price increase to the readers, for fear of a drop in circulation, but from the vendors themselves.¹⁹ To do so, Nasaw describes how Pulitzer and Hearst imposed a “wholesale price increase” to the newsboys in 1898 and in doing so “expected to reduce their losses to manageable levels.”²⁰

Although Pulitzer and Hearst only thought it to be a small, one cent increase per 10

¹⁶ “The Call,” *San Francisco Call*, March 2, 1897, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1897-03-02/ed-1/seq-6/%3Bwords%3D/> (accessed January 12, 2010)

¹⁷ Seitz, 215

¹⁸ “Newsboys Act and Talk,” *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9C02EEDD1E39E433A25756C2A9619C94689ED7CF> (accessed November 8, 2009).

¹⁹ Nasaw, 168

²⁰ Nasaw, 168

papers, the newsboys felt the harsh effects in the summer of 1899 when newspapers were harder to sell because headlines, as Nasaw comments, “grew tamer.”²¹

With less attractive headlines and sales declining, the newsboys expected their distributors would soon revert to the original price from a year ago like other city papers had done. When the two papers refused to return their prices from 60 cents back to 50 cents per 100 to the newsboys on July 21, 1899, the *Tribune* reported that the newsboys became outraged, explaining to reporters how at the “old price they (newsboys) were only able to make about 25 cents a day, and the continued increase in price to them would mean a loss in livelihood.”²² The inability to generate a consistent and sufficient profit already infuriated the young news vendors, an added expenditure from Pulitzer and Hearst only worsened the newsboys’ hardened lifestyles. Timothy J. Gilfoyle asserts there were a reported 15,000 homeless youths living on the streets of New York City at the time.²³ For those newsboys who found themselves within those reported 15,000, paying more money to sell a product at the same price further diminished their standard of living. The difference of 10 cents per 100 papers became the boiling point for the downtrodden newsboys. One of the leaders of the strike, known as “Kid Blink,” emphasized the importance of the difference in a speech to his fellow strikers, “Ten cents to the dollar is as much to us as it is to Mr. Hearst, the millionaire. Am I right boys? We can do more with 10 cents than he can do with twenty-five.”²⁴

²¹ Nasaw, 169

²² “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-21/ed-1/seq-10/;words=newsboys+newsboy> (accessed October 3, 2009).

²³ Gilfoyle, Timothy J. “Street-Rats and Gutter-Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900,” *Journal of Social History* (2004): 855

²⁴ “Newsboys Act and Talk,” *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899

Following the initial newspaper reports that the *World* and *Journal* planned to continue their increased price per paper, the newsboys took to the streets in anger. The results of the increased price were seen when dozens of boys announced their refusal to buy any copies of the *World* or the *Journal*. Soon after the first refusals to purchase the papers, a group of 300 of the young news vendors gathered in Park Row near the main distribution centers of the two papers. The *Tribune* recorded, “Early in the morning, half a dozen small figures were grouped about their leader ‘Jack’ Sullivan.”²⁵ After meeting together to discuss their options, the boys created an arbitration committee in the hopes of presenting their objections and convincing Pulitzer and Hearst to lower the prices.²⁶ Shortly after their arbitration committee was denied any real discussion, the boys decided that “De time is overripe fer action.”²⁷ Following their decision, Sullivan was quoted by the *Tribune* telling the other newsboys, “If you sees any one sellin’ the Woild or Joinal, swat ‘em. Tear ‘em up, trow ‘em in de river – any ole ting.”²⁸ The group heard Sullivan’s words and quickly moved throughout the city searching for any newsboy who decided to defy their strike and sell the papers.

Nasaw explains when the boys found someone selling the papers, they called the defiant newsboy a “scab” and proceeded to distract and heckle him enough to steal his newspapers before tearing them apart in the street.²⁹ The *Tribune*’s first published reports on the attacks against the scabs paints a violent and angry picture of the newsboys’ efforts to fight the *World* and the *Journal*:

²⁵ “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899

²⁶ “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899

²⁷ “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899

²⁸ “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899

²⁹ Nasaw, 169

A solitary newsboy stood on the sidewalk offering extras to the passers by. He smiled complacently, for there were no rivals in the field. Suddenly the word “Scab!” broke upon his ear. He turned quickly and made a dive for safety. But he was too late. A hundred newsboys seemed to spring from the earth at once, and he found himself in the centre of a howling, hooting group.³⁰

The newsboys continued their first day of the strike in a similar fashion as they confiscated and destroyed any copies of the newspapers they could find, while rejoicing as the paper “fragments scattered into the four winds.”³¹ The disposal of other newsboys’ copies of the *World* and the *Journal* was just the beginning for the rebellious young men. The boys devised several other means of gaining momentum to stop production for the two largest newspapers in New York City.

Deciding on the strongest and smartest move to defeat Pulitzer and Hearst, the newsboys “organized into a union.”³² Bartoletti indicates the newsboys organized to the point that they even “elected officers, formed a committee on discipline, determined a strike strategy, and sent out delegates to spread the word to other newsies.”³³ Despite the newsboys’ well-organized union, Pulitzer and Hearst ignored the young men and decided they would continue to sell and distribute their respective newspapers as they always did. On the first day the *World* and *Journal* distributed their papers during the strike, the *New York Sun* reported:

Fully a hundred boys were gathered in Park Row at the hour when the first editions of the “yellows” usually come out, and as soon as the wagons started there was a great howl and police came on the run and the boys scattered hastily, for an order [from the Committee on Discipline

³⁰ “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899

³¹ “Newsboys go on strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 21, 1899

³² “The Strike of the Newsboys,” *New York Times.com*, July 22, 1899, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9D00E4D71430E132A25751C2A9619C94689ED7CF> (accessed November 4, 2009)

³³ Bartoletti, 54

which was running the strike] had gone out, it is said, that the police are not to be injured. All the boys were armed with clubs and most of them wore in their headgear placards denouncing the scab extras and calling on the public to boycott them.³⁴

Undeterred by their failed first effort to distribute their papers, Pulitzer and Hearst again sent out their regular wagons on July 23. Again, the newsboys were ready for the challenge as they chased down the wagons “with a cry of exultation” while they proceeded to mob and severely beat the wagons with stones.³⁵ The newsboys gained confidence and numbers with each newspaper and wagon they destroyed, and looked to tell anyone who would listen they would continue to “strike until they give us what we want.”³⁶

The newsboys stayed true to their words as they attacked wagons and destroyed newsstands across the city, until it proved “impossible at the moment to buy a *World* or *Journal* in the streets of the whole city.”³⁷ The strike gained momentum with each day, so much in fact that not even a full three days into their plans the newsboys were praised as the creators of the “most successful (strike) in the history of the city.”³⁸ The strike grew so quickly that two days into the boycott, Hearst was reported to have been run off by newsboys:

William Randolph Hearst was in Herald Square to-night attempting to buy a copy of the *Evening Journal*. He was soon surrounded by a great mob of boys, who hooted him

³⁴ Nasaw, 141

³⁵ John Wilson, “Newsboys Word Stands,” *New York Tribune*, July 23, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-23/ed-1/seq-3/> (accessed October 9, 2009).

³⁶ “Newsboys Word Stands,” *New York Tribune*, July 23, 1899

³⁷ “Newsboys on Strike,” *The Saint Paul Globe*, July 23, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059523/1899-07-23/ed-1/seq-14/>; words=NEWSBOYS+newsboys+newsboy (accessed October 17, 2009)

³⁸ “Newsboys on Strike,” *The Saint Paul Globe*, July 23, 1899

and for a while it looked as if they might attack him. He finally made his escape, followed by the howling strikers.³⁹

The 300 young men who first attempted to arbitrate a compromise with Pulitzer and Hearst now rallied more than 5,000 newsboys from across the city, 2,000 of which joined from Brooklyn alone.⁴⁰

With momentum and a union larger than they first thought possible on their side, the newsboys sought to gain more public support as they carefully planned a parade in the streets of the city. The *Salt Lake Herald* noted the newsboys' parade was "to be headed by a band and carriages and it is thought several thousand newsboys will parade."⁴¹ After New York City police refused to furnish permits for their parade, the boys still held smaller parades in the streets to create local awareness of their cause. They gained widespread support from the community which tilted more pressure onto the two media giants of New York City. The boys looked to inform anyone who would listen as they "placarded the city asking the public not to buy yellow journals."⁴² Kid Blink's leadership proved to be a pivotal tool for the newsboys as well. Making himself noticed with a powerful speech to not just the newsboys, but the public in general, Blink ordered his fellow strikers to confiscate the papers of a scab coming from the boycotted paper's distribution center.⁴³ Knowing the violence was in plain view of the public, Blink used this example to justify their cause to the newspaper readers of New York City:

³⁹ "Hooted by Newsboys," *San Francisco Call*, July 23, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1899-07-23/ed-1/seq-2/?words=NEWSBOYS+newsboys> (Accessed January 27, 2010)

⁴⁰ "Boys Did Not Parade," *Salt Lake Herald*, July 27, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85058130/1899-07-27/ed-1/seq-1/?words=newsboys+Newsboys> (Accessed January 27, 2010)

⁴¹ "Boys Did Not Parade," *Salt Lake Herald*, July 27, 1899

⁴² "Hooted by Newsboys," *San Francisco Call*, July 23, 1899

⁴³ "Newsboys Word Stands," *New York Tribune*, July 23, 1899. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-23/ed-1/seq-3/> (accessed October 17, 2009)

“He don’t lose anything,” continued the “Kid.” “Coz why? He’s hired by de pape to make a bluff. You see, he came out de same way, and after the gang had copped his papas he goes up and de’ editor breaks off de leg of his table and gives it to him fer a club. But me men lays fer him wen his blinkers be droopin’, an’ de club’s now found poimanint restin’ place in de arkhives of de union.”⁴⁴

Kid Blink’s speech to the union and the public revealed the violence of the strike was not a one-sided affair. Blink’s display of new information to the citizens of New York City rallied more support and sympathy for the strikers as the strike continued to portray the newspapers in a negative light.

Pulitzer and Hearst’s attempts to regain popularity with their readers was hard pressed as the public’s “good natured attitude toward the strikers” only hindered Pulitzer and Hearst from reviving their financially unstable organizations.⁴⁵ The agitated attitude of the general public toward the *World* and the *Journal* began to spill into the opinion sections of competing newspapers. In an editorial to the *Times*, a Mr. Marion demanded that the hostile nature the press, such as the *Times*, *World*, and *Journal*, held toward “the workingman on strike” must end, especially against the “irrepressible small boy.”⁴⁶ Marion continued, expressing that he hoped the strike would end peacefully, but the press must cease to picture the workingman, and newsboy, as a “criminal” and “habitual idler.”⁴⁷ The newsboys were the exact definition of “irrepressible,” as Mr. Marion stated. Although violent, they rebelled in plain sight of the public, not to act as “urchins,” as the

⁴⁴ “Newsboys Word Stands,” July 23, 1899

⁴⁵ “Newsboys Continue Strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 26, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-26/ed-1/seq-4/> (accessed October 10, 2009)

⁴⁶ “Letter to Editor,” *New York Times.com*, July 23, 1899, http://spiderbites.nytimes.com/free_1899/articles_1899_07_00000.html (accessed November 17, 2009)

⁴⁷ “Letter to Editor,” *New York Times.com*, July 23, 1899

Times often referred to them, but to create awareness for their cause and eliminate any business for the two papers.⁴⁸

The newsboys' strategy to cease distribution of the "yellows" was well meditated and effectively devastated the income of the boycotted papers. The young men, however, forgot one important aspect of the *World* and *Journal*'s distribution system: the newswomen of New York City. Although a majority of the newspaper sellers of the city were young men under the age of 20, there was a minority of young women who also bought and sold the *World* and the *Journal*, such as Annie Keely.⁴⁹ Keely and other newswomen regularly bought and sold newspapers just as the boys did. However, when the strike occurred, many of the women opted not to join the boys, and they continued to sell copies of the *World* and *Journal*. In the beginning stages of the strike, the newswomens' actions were condoned:

The few weary-looking women who sell newspapers on Park Row and at the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge apparently are not participating in the strike, for they offered all the evening papers for sale as usual. They passed unmolested through the lines of strikers and indeed mingled with the boys and offered the barred papers for sale.⁵⁰

Although their male counterparts who were caught selling the boycotted newspapers were handled roughly, the *Tribune* stated the women thought "themselves safe from vengeance on account of their sex as they sold the tabooed papers."⁵¹

⁴⁸ "Letter to Editor," *New York Times.com*, July 23, 1899

⁴⁹ "Strike's Last Hope," *New York Tribune*, July 22, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-22/ed-1/seq-1/> (accessed October, 16, 2009)

⁵⁰ "The Strike of the Newsboy," *New York Times*, July 22, 1899, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9D00E4D71430E132A25751C2A9619C94689ED7CFhttp://www.freewebs.com/allamericanreje ct1990/therealnewsieshistory.htm> (Accessed October 21, 2009)

⁵¹ "Newsboys Act and Talk," *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899

For the first few days of the strike this proved true. However, their gender could only protect them for so long from the growing strike. After deciding they would have to stop the newswomen to maintain pressure on Pulitzer and Hearst, the newsboys announced to the *Tribune* that “warfare has been begun on the newswomen who persist in buying the two papers at the increased price.”⁵² As hard as the young men tried to decipher which women were with them and who was against them, they proved to almost always be a step behind. In an interview with a *Tribune* reporter, an older newswoman stated she “made good money while the boys were fightin’. Still. I didn’t want to hurt their feelins’ so I hid the papers they boycotted under my apron and sold ‘em on the sly.”⁵³ The boys decided the only way to stop the women was to eliminate the source of distribution. Later in the day the newsboys announced the women would “no longer be allowed to do business,” and agreed they would not allow the women to pick up the papers from the distributors.⁵⁴ By forcibly ending almost all sales of the *World* and *Journal*, the newsboys left Pulitzer and Hearst with few options to regain their steady income without surrendering to the boys’ demands as their cause continued to grow.

Multiple sources and statements from newspapers across the United States reported the strike “had spread to suburban cities and as far east as Fall River,” which was approximately 200 miles away from the heart of the newsboys’ strike.⁵⁵ With such a large distance between Fall River and New York City, it is evident the newsboys’ strike had gathered tremendous momentum in less than 10 days. With the additional motivation

⁵² “Newsboys Strike,” *Marietta Daily Leader*, July 26, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87075213/1899-07-26/ed-1/seq-1/;words=Newsboys+newsboys> (Accessed December 16, 2009)

⁵³ “Newsboys Continue Strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 26, 1899

⁵⁴ “Newsboys Strike,” *Marietta Daily Leader*, July 26, 1899

⁵⁵ “Newsboys Strike,” *Marietta Daily Leader*, July 26, 1899

of the strike spreading, the boys continued to disrupt any wagons that carried the *World* or *Journal*, as they hoped to apply even more pressure to the already devastated finances of Pulitzer and Hearst.⁵⁶ Although their strike was directly affecting the *World* and the *Journal*, it also indirectly inspired other newsboys in the New England region to join in the boycott:

The “New-York Daily News” capitulated and acceded to the demands of the strikers. A representative of the circulation department of “The News” spent several hours in Yonkers in the forenoon endeavoring to effect a reconciliation with the boys, but his arguments were useless. Soon after the departure of “The News” representative from the city, the local agent received a message stating that the wholesale price had been reduced in Yonkers from 60 to 50 cents. The boys made great demonstration over their victory and their strike against the *Evening World* and the *Evening Journal* has been strengthened greatly as a result.⁵⁷

Other reports stated the strike also reached parts of Providence, Rhode Island, where newsboys created a “sympathetic strike” and refused “to handle the two New York evening newspapers with which their brethren in New York are having a controversy.”⁵⁸

The boys’ efforts also persuaded public opinion that the only way to stabilize both Pulitzer and Hearst’s economic crises was if the two rivals dropped their prices back to the original price of two papers for one cent.⁵⁹

Realizing how far their strike had come and how close they were to victory, the newsboys decided to hold a mass meeting of newsboys from across the city. The large amount of press coverage the boys received in the previous days created a wealth of

⁵⁶ “Newsboys Strike,” *Marietta Daily Leader*, July 26, 1899

⁵⁷ “Yonkers Boys Win a Victory,” *New York Tribune*, July 28, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-28/ed-1/seq-2/> (Accessed October 16, 2009)

⁵⁸ “Providence Boys Join in Strike,” *New York Tribune*, July 28, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-28/ed-1/seq-2/> (Accessed October 16, 2009)

⁵⁹ *Globe*, July 27, 1899

public exposure which helped rally support for their cause. The *Tribune* reported the newsboys were expecting “a number of well known persons” such as “state senator T.D. Sullivan, C.D. Sullivan, Florence J. Sullivan, and Jim Lavelle” to address the large crowd of newsboys.⁶⁰ After they reserved New Irving Hall for the evening, nearly 2,000 boys filed in for a night of speeches from newsboy Dave Simons, Mr. Brennan of the newsdealers association, newsboys’ union leader Kid Blink, and other supporters of the boys’ strike.⁶¹ The most surprising event of the meeting was Kid Blink’s speech, in which he told his fellow newsies to no longer attack the distribution wagons or the drivers and to rather focus on sticking “together like plaster” and winning their 10 cents back through nonviolence.⁶² Kid Blink’s request for an end to the violent tactics of the newsboys reveals how the boys were truly an organized union, and not just a group of scrappy young men sporadically attacking news stands and wagons as the *Times* first reported.⁶³ Following Kid Blink’s speech, Mr. Brennan and other newsdealers addressed the boys and then presented a set of resolutions “asking the public to refrain from buying or advertising in the two evening papers.”⁶⁴ With the help of the newsdealers, the newsboys took a stranglehold on the futures of the *World* and the *Journal*.

With the newsboys’ effective strategy and their continued momentum, the young men’s strike became the two newspapers’ biggest problem and top priority. Forced to make a quick decision about the security of their newspapers, Pulitzer and Hearst both agreed to take an alternate route to continue the sale of their papers. They first attempted to compromise with the newsboys, “It was said yesterday that an offer had been made to

⁶⁰ “Newsboys Act and Talk,” *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899

⁶¹ “Newsboys Act and Talk,” *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899

⁶² “Newsboys Act and Talk,” *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899

⁶³ “The Strike of the Newsboys,” *New York Times.com*, July 22, 1899

⁶⁴ “Newsboys Act and Talk,” *New York Times.com*, July 25, 1899

the newsboys to lower the price and sell the papers at 55 cents a hundred, but that they (newsboys) had refused and would hold out until the price was reduced to 50 cents a hundred.”⁶⁵ The *World* and the *Journal’s* first attempt to negotiate a compromise with the boys proved to be a failure. The boys stood firm at 50 cents per 100 papers and refused to take anything less. After the refusal, Pulitzer and Hearst attempted to reestablish the sale of their newspapers by hiring new vendors. They believed the best course of action to do so would be to avoid employing small newsboys who were intimidated by the strikers for selling copies of their papers. The two newspapers answered the problem by putting “able bodied men in the streets under pay of \$2 per day to sell the papers.”⁶⁶

Amid the boys’ resurgence of violence and anger toward these newly hired scabs, the newsboys looked to their union leader for the next move. Unfortunately for the boys, Kid Blink was arrested for disorderly conduct for his actions that day.⁶⁷ He was later bailed out, after which he swore to his fellow strikers he “would lead the strike with a new found bitterness.”⁶⁸ The bitterness proved to be short and much more sweet than bitter, for Kid Blink at least:

There was less sympathy for him (Kid Blink) than might have been expected, as the idea prevailed yesterday that he had accepted a bribe from one or both papers to put an end to the strike. He appeared in Park Row yesterday morning in a new suit of clothes that was not within the memory of the oldest living newsboy. He was also said to have displayed a large roll of bills.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ “Kid Blink Arrested,” *New York Tribune*, July 28, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-28/ed-1/seq-2/> (Accessed October, 16, 2009)

⁶⁶ “Newsboys Strike,” *Marietta Daily Leader*, July 26, 1899

⁶⁷ “Kid Blink Arrested,” *New York Tribune*, July 28, 1899

⁶⁸ “Kid Blink Arrested,” *New York Tribune*, July 28, 1899

⁶⁹ “Kid Blink Arrested,” *New York Tribune*, July 28, 1899

The newsboys' leader became a traitor to his own cause, and the boys lashed out against the scabs in response to Kid Blink's actions. They quickly filled the streets of the city, sought out copies of the boycotted papers, and began to destroy the papers so rapidly that "Park Row and vicinity was covered with the torn sheets."⁷⁰

Despite the boys' return to the violent nature of their strike, the arrest of Kid Blink and the hiring of the scabs rattled the foundation of their campaign. By hiring these men and bribing Kid, Pulitzer and Hearst indirectly announced they would rather risk losing more money than allowing the newsboys to win. Realizing the newsboys' strike needed immediate assistance, the newsdealers convened and created an agreement to "support the newsboys in their strike against the two afternoon papers."⁷¹ The newsdealers' decision to no longer carry the *World* or the *Journal* eliminated nearly all locations for the public to purchase a copy of the papers. With practically all their carriers boycotting their product, *The Times* of Richmond, Va., reported that the "proprietor of one of the boycotted papers" decided he would "consent to have the dispute submitted to arbitration."⁷² The newsboys soon found out what happened and erupted into celebrations throughout the streets as they regarded the news as "strong evidence that they had the best of the fight."⁷³

After almost two weeks of relentless destruction of their product, Pulitzer and Hearst decided to form a compromise with the newsboys. Nasaw concludes "the price would remain where it was, but the *World* and *Journal* would henceforth take back all

⁷⁰ "Newsboy Strike Strengthens," *The Times* (Va.), July 29, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85034438/1899-07-29/ed-1/seq-4/;words=Newsdealers> (accessed December 4, 2009)

⁷¹ "Newsboy Strike Strengthens," *The Times* (Va.), July 29, 1899

⁷² "Newsboy Strike Strengthens," *The Times* (Va.), July 29, 1899

⁷³ "Newsboy Strike Strengthens," *The Times* (Va.), July 29, 1899

unsold papers at 100 percent refund.⁷⁴ The agreement benefited both parties as it boosted the income of the newsboys and stabilized the *World* and *Journal's* finances. Although Pulitzer and Hearst did reap some reward from the compromise, the newsboys were the real winners of the arbitration. By buying back all unsold copies of the *World* and the *Journal*, the newsboys were able to only generate a profit for themselves and never were in danger of losing their money from buying too many newspapers from the distributors. No matter how little they sold, the boys never would go into debt so long as they returned their papers to the publishers. The compromise was a tremendous win for the newsboys as it created a profit each day they went out to sell newspapers for either Hearst or Pulitzer.

The newsboys strike lasted a little more two weeks, but in that span of time the strike garnered the attention of the general public, and exposed the full effects of the injustices Pulitzer and Hearst imposed on the young men. The large numbers of newsboys who joined the union and participated in their violent actions was a visual display of the frustration newsboys felt from bearing the burden of two rivals who wished to best each other without going bankrupt. The boys dealt with violence, betrayal, and even harsh criticism for not settling for a lesser compromise when the opportunity was presented to them.⁷⁵ From New York City to Yonkers, these young news vendors displayed the determination, intelligence, and willpower necessary to claim a large victory to help ease their impoverished lifestyles. Their successful arbitration sent a

⁷⁴ Nasaw, 176

⁷⁵ "Fable Repeated in Fact," *New York Tribune*, July 30, 1899, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1899-07-30/ed-1/seq-5/?words=newsboys+fables> (accessed January 5, 2010)

message to the two media giants, that respect and decency must be given to all the workers of the *World* and the *Journal*- even the lowliest of newsboys.

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