

Educational materials developed through the Baltimore County History Labs Program, a partnership between Baltimore County Public Schools and the UMBC Center for History Education.

RS#11: Placing the Responsibility

The Outlook, April 29, 1911. Similar to the *Literary Digest*, this publication was a weekly news and opinion magazine aimed especially at New York City residents. This article follows two weeks after factory owners Harris and Blanck were charged with manslaughter for locking factory doors.

Placing the Responsibility

Coroner's juries are not popularly supposed to act, as a rule with the highest wisdom and forcefulness, but a most notable exception has been presented in the case of the coroner's jury dealing with the recent Washington Place fire in New York City.

This jury was made up of men well qualified to consider the questions at issue, for it included engineers, architects, builders, and business men.

The findings not only criticized the conditions existing in the factory in which the fatalities occurred, but made sensible and clearly expressed recommendations to the authorities for dealing with the danger of fire throughout the city.

Harris and Blanck, who comprise the firm whose employees were burned, and who had been already indicated by the Grand Jury, were declared responsible for the death of the two women whose cases were presented to the coroner's jury, because of culpable and criminal negligence in leaving a door locked which should have permitted these women to escape.

Furthermore, the jury declared that no attention had been given or means provided for quick exit of the employees, but that, on the contrary, their safety had been utterly disregarded. The crowding of tables and lack of passageways are instanced, as well as the locking of doors.

The jury declared that the conditions obtaining in this factory were such that, if they were not forbidden by law, such a law should be instantly framed.

The jury recommends that fire-escapes should be regularly inspected by the Fire Department and reported to the Bureau of Buildings, and that then the latter should order changes made and have power to enforce such orders.

It is further recommended that every application for a new building should show for what purpose it is to be used, and that, if its use should be changed, written consent from the Superintendent of Buildings should be required, and he should make certain that after the change the building conforms to the law for that class of buildings to which it would now really belong.

Concentration of responsibility is strongly urged, and there are specific recommendations for improvement of the laws or practice as regards inspection of factory buildings, the construction of stairways, the use of automatic sprinklers, and the posting of rules in the buildings.

The public continues to take the strongest possible interest in the investigation as to the cause of this fire, and will agree with the coroner in his thanks to the jury for doing a work of great benefit to the public, and also in his hope that the jury's recommendation will result in immediate and practical reform.

The Outlook . "Placing the Responsibility." April 29, 1911.

http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/texts/newspaper/outlook_042911.html?location=Investigation,+Tri+al,+and+Reform (accessed June 28, 2010).