



Living Wage Analysis

Objective

What is a living wage? Why was it a suggested reform during the Gilded Age?

Pre-Analysis: Review this chart below and answer the analysis questions that follow.

Person	Daily Wage Rate* - Manufacturing Industries (1899)	Hourly Wage Rate 1899	Yearly Income - 1899 Estimated (today's value)
Skilled men	\$2.25	22 cents an hour	\$702 (\$20,000)
Unskilled men	\$1.23	12 cents an hour	\$383 (\$11,000)
Skilled women	\$1.32	13 cents an hour	\$412 (\$11,500)
Unskilled women	\$0.78	8 cents an hour	\$243 (\$6800)
In comparison, Andrew Carnegie made approximately \$40,000,000 in 1899 (\$1,091,062,674 in today's dollars)			

[Source: Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics 1899](#)

**For this daily rate, laborers were expected to work 10 - 14 hours a day, 6 days a week*

Pre-Analysis Questions:

- 1) The rates listed in the table are an average for laborers in manufacturing industries, such as the steel industry. Andrew Carnegie owned one of the largest steel manufacturers in the country. How would you describe the differences in wealth between Andrew Carnegie and his workers?

- 2) How different do you think life was for the laborers in comparison to Andrew Carnegie?

Document Analysis: Read the document below and answer the analysis questions that follow on the next page.

Source: *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects* by Rev. John A. Ryan (New York, 1912)
(note: **bolded** words are defined beneath the excerpt)

“A man’s **natural rights** are as many and as extensive as are the **liberties**, opportunities, and possessions that are required for the reasonable maintenance and development of his personality...Some of them, for instance the right to live and the right to marry, are original and primary, **inhering** in all persons of whatever condition; others are **derived** and secondary, occasioned and determined by the particular circumstances of particular persons. To the second class belongs the right to a living wage. It is not an original and universal right; for the receiving of wages supposes that form of **industrial** organization known as the wage system, which has not always existed and is not essential to human **welfare**....The right to a living wage is evidently a derived right which is measured and determined by existing social and industrial institutions....

So much for the right to **subsistence**, to a bare livelihood. By a decent livelihood is meant that amount of the necessities and comforts of life that is in keeping with the dignity of a human being. It has not precise relation to the conventional standard of living that may **prevail** within any social or industrial class, but describes rather that minimum of conditions which the average person of a given age or gender must enjoy in order to live as a human being should live...in a reasonable degree of comfort...He must have food, clothing and shelter...

The obligation of providing the **laborer** with a Living Wage...rests upon the State...Negatively, liberty is the absence of restraint; positively, it is the power to act and enjoy...the absence of State intervention means the presence of **insuperable** obstacles to real and effective liberty...Such legislation would secure a wider measure of freedom in larger economic opportunity....the State has both the right and duty to compel all employers to pay a Living Wage.”

Vocabulary

Liberties: freedom over choices to make for oneself

Inhering: exist within (permanent)

Derived: acquired, gained, not just given to you

Industrial: related to business, commercial production, trade

Wage: payment for labor

Subsistence: maintenance

Prevail: overcome

Laborer: someone who works at physical work for a living (coal miner, railroad worker), workman

Insuperable: difficult to overcome

Analysis Questions:

1. *Sourcing*: Is this a primary or secondary source?

2. *Close Reading*: According to Rev. John A. Ryan, is the living wage a primary or secondary natural right?

- a. *Analysis*: Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

3. *Close Reading*: What does the following quote mean?

“By a decent livelihood is meant that amount of the necessities and comforts of life that is in keeping with the dignity of a human being. It has not precise relation to the conventional standard of living that might prevail within any social or industrial class, but describes rather that minimum of conditions which the average person of a given age or gender must enjoy in order to live as a human being should live....in a reasonable degree of comfort...he must have food, clothing, and shelter”

- a. *Analysis*: Do you agree that a minimum or a living wage should provide you with what Rev. John A. Ryan has listed above?

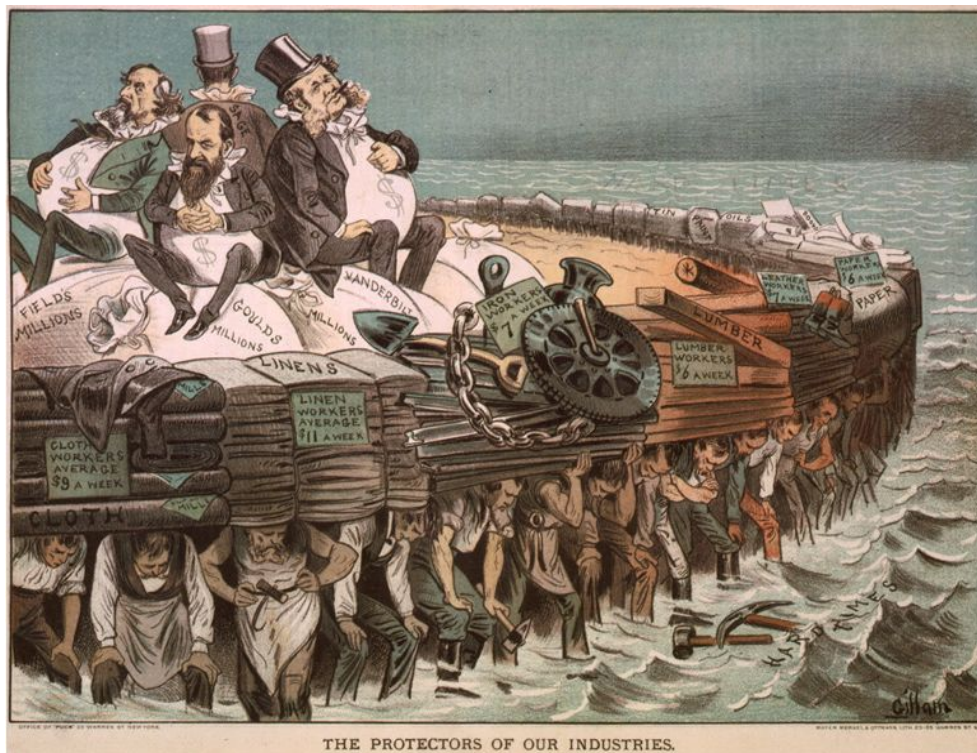
4. *Close Reading*: Who does Rev. Ryan believe has to provide the laborer with a living wage: industrialists/industry or the state?

- a. Do you think progressives at the time agreed with him? Why or why not?

5. *Contextualization:* Based on your knowledge of social studies and the Gilded Age, does the table below seem accurate? Why or why not?

Cause	Effect	Reform
Industrialization	Wages are low to keep labor costs low and industrialists profits high	Living wage was necessary to allow workers the opportunity to live a decent life

6. *Contextualization:* Closely examine this political cartoon which was drawn in 1883. Based on this image, and the information provided in the historical context, what do you think motivated Rev. John A. Ryan to suggest a living wage?





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What is a living wage? Why was it a suggested reform during the Gilded Age?

Task - Using the documents above, and your knowledge of US History, please complete the following:

Compare and contrast 2017 with the Gilded Age.

- [Review this infographic from the National Low Income Housing Coalition](#)
 - Based on this infographic, what do you think about wages today? Is today's minimum wage a living wage?
 - What do you think Rev. Ryan would say about today's minimum wage based on this infographic? Cite evidence from the primary source above to support your claims.