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FIG. 91. Revolutionary Lucy Parsons, Chicago, 1915.

PARSONS, LUCY E.

March 1853–March 7, 1942

SEAMSTRESS, REVOLUTIONARY, LABOR ORGANIZER,
JOURNALIST

According to Carolyn Ashbaugh, whose full-length biography, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (1976), remains the standard work, there are few documented facts and many conflicting stories about Lucy Parsons's origins, including those recounted by the subject herself. Lucy Parsons identified herself as Native American and Chicana, Ashbaugh contends, "in an effort to cover up her black heritage" (p. 268). Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enriquez, in *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (1979), argue for acceptance of Parsons's self-identification. They contend that Ashbaugh, "acknowledging that 'little is known of Lucy's origins' . . . delve[s] into [her] psyche, suggesting that her Mexican identity was but an excuse [sic] in self-denial" (p. 91). In 1976, Ashbaugh, aware of the controversy her conclusions about Lucy Parsons's identity had provoked, spoke with Katharine Parsons Russell, who told her that "although the Parsons family denied publicly that Lucy was black, . . . the family privately" acknowledged "her black ancestry" (Ashbaugh, 267, note 4). Lucy Parsons lived her entire life as a woman of color, in a society where the construction of a

racial identity had increasing importance and racism prevailed. Throughout her life, Lucy Parsons championed the rights of the oppressed and the enslaved and in words and deeds spoke out forcefully against racism and for equality. People of color—Chicanas, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics—identify with her struggle and feel a kinship with this revolutionary woman. Until there is conclusive evidence, it seems appropriate to call her a woman of color who sought the liberation of all peoples oppressed by racism.

Even Lucy Parsons's name remains in question. Lulu Parsons and Lucy Ella Parsons are two versions found in the record. Her family name may have been Gathings, from the Gathings family that owned slaves in Waco, Texas, but this theory is based on speculation by Ashbaugh rather than any documentation. On the other hand, Ashbaugh writes, "Henry and Marie del Gather (whom [sic] Lucy claimed were her uncle and mother, respectively) and John Waller (the civilized Creek Indian who was supposedly her father) are probably fictitious" (p. 268). To complicate matters, Lucy Parsons gave different maiden names on the birth certificates of her son and her daughter—Carter on the former and Hull on the latter—and "provided Gonzales [sic]

as her maiden name to the *Dictionary of American Biography* for its account of Albert Parsons. On Lucy's death certificate her parents are listed as Pedro Diaz and Marie Gonzales [sic]" (p. 268).

Beyond this serious confusion, little is known about Lucy E. Parsons's childhood in Waco, Texas. There is no documentation to prove that she was born into slavery in Texas, but during the Reconstruction era, she most likely witnessed the "atrocities of the Ku Klux Klan in the South. Among the crimes committed by the Klan in or near Waco were the castration of a black boy in January, 1867; the murder of an eight year old black girl by rape in July, 1867; and the murder of a black man in the Waco Public Square in February, 1868" (Ashbaugh, 14). She met Albert Richard Parsons, who was white and the descendant of New England Puritans. Orphaned, he had traveled to Texas where his eldest brother William Henry Parsons, who was twenty years his senior, was an attorney and journalist. Albert Parsons, at the age of nineteen, was the founding editor in Waco of a Radical Republican weekly paper, the *Spectator*, from 1867 to 1868. Although he and his brother William had fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, both switched sides, and Albert Parsons advocated civil rights for black freedmen after the war. Albert Parsons and his brother William both went into politics, joining the Radical Republicans and participating in the Reconstruction struggle in Texas. Albert Parsons was threatened with lynching when he attempted to register black voters in Waco. He became "a traveling correspondent and subscription agent" (Avrich, 10) for the *Houston Telegraph*, a newspaper published by his brother William, and it was during a long trip through northwestern Texas in 1869 that he first met his future wife. Albert Parsons's autobiography describes Lucy as a "charming young Spanish Indian maiden" (Avrich, 11). She was living on her uncle's ranch in Johnson County, according to Parsons, and three years later he returned to marry her. Ashbaugh doubts whether Lucy and Albert Parsons were ever formally married, since "laws against miscegenation would have prevented that" (p. 14). However, "both bride and groom maintained that they were married in Austin [Texas] in 1872, as does William Parsons, who insists that the wedding was 'a matter of public record in that city,' adding that Lucy's claim to Spanish and Indian ancestry was 'never questioned'" (Avrich, 12). No marriage license has been found, however. In the world of Reconstruction America, where terrible violence against people of color was an everyday occurrence, the construction of identity takes on a quality quite different from today's world. The couple, who were "deeply and passionately in love" and "remained devoted to each other" (Avrich, 12), moved to Chicago in 1873, leaving behind the heightened violence of the Ku Klux Klan in Texas.

The Parsons' arrival in the northern industrial city coincided with nationwide economic depression and labor agitation. The depression in 1873 deepened as "cities like Chicago recorded a rising number of deaths from starvation . . . homeless men and women wandered the streets . . . lining up daily before the soup kitchens established in working-class neighborhoods . . . [until] by 1877, according to some accounts, the number of unemployed had risen to nearly three million—in a nation of forty-five million people" (Avrich, 16). "As many as fifteen million"

struggled to survive "at the poverty level" (Avrich, 16). A militant labor movement emerged in this period of hunger parades and mass meetings, and American-born and foreign-born leaders debated strategies and ideologies to combat the power of the capitalist class. In Chicago, in particular, events had been building toward a confrontation between labor and capital. Enormous dislocation of working-class families, caused by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, preceded the depression in 1873. Discontent with the way in which the wealthy managers of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, including George Pullman and Marshall Field, handled the disbursement of funds to the needy provoked a response. By December 1873, Chicago witnessed a series of demonstrations by the unemployed, including marches through the streets, mass meetings, and demands on local government to relieve the plight of the poor and homeless. The Chicago Relief and Aid Society itself was targeted by the desperate protesters. On December 21, 1873, the "labor organizations in the city arranged a mass meeting in which some five thousand persons took part" (Avrich, 17); reflecting the diversity of the city's population, "speeches were delivered in five languages" (p. 17). From this mass meeting a committee was formed to present demands to the municipal government. The city council did nothing and the mayor called upon the Chicago and Relief Aid to distribute "part of the fund that had been collected for victims of the 1871 fire" (p. 17). Ten thousand workers and unemployed assembled in front of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society offices demanding that the unemployed be given adequate relief promptly. Other marches by socialists and trade unionists had become more frequent.

In Chicago, the Parsons lived in poor working-class German neighborhoods, where workers labored in "basement sweatshops" (Ashbaugh, 16), families lived in crowded quarters, and the infant mortality rate was the highest in the city. "Albert Parsons worked as a printer and joined Typographical Union No. 16 in 1874" (Ashbaugh, 16). In March 1876, Parsons "attended a meeting of the Social Democratic Working Men's [sic] Party of North America" (Avrich, 20), where he heard Peter McGuire outline "the program of his party, which called for the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist commonwealth" (Avrich, 20). McGuire asked those interested in forming an English section of the party to meet with him at the end of the meeting, and Parsons, together with George A. Schilling and Thomas J. Morgan, "future stalwarts in the Chicago labor movement" (Avrich, 20), came forward. This step launched Parsons's career as a labor organizer who expounded the evils of capitalism and the virtues of a socialist system.

The Chicago English group of the Workingmen's Party met regularly at the home of Lucy and Albert Parsons. Lucy Parsons and her husband read the works of Karl Marx and German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle. Those who followed Lassalle favored a political approach to social change, whereas the Marxists advocated organizing trade unions and achieving change through economic organization and action. The Workingmen's Party in Chicago attempted to include both positions, a compromise accepted by Albert Parsons. Parsons, in addition to becoming a member of Typographical Union No. 16, was also one of the founders of Local 400, the first local assembly of the Knights of Labor in Chicago.

In the summer of 1877, with the economy still not recovered from the depression that had begun in 1873, the country faced a nationwide railroad strike that began in the East and moved westward. Not only did railroad workers stop rail transport, but sympathetic trade unionists in other crafts also walked off their jobs. By July 25, 1877, there was a virtual general strike that reached all the way to the Pacific. The strike continued for two weeks. “For the first time federal troops had to be called out during peacetime to suppress a domestic disturbance” (Avrich, 26). Albert Parsons emerged as a leading figure during the strike days in Chicago. He spoke on July 23, 1877, to a crowd of thousands, imploring workers to use the legislative process, not violence. Both he and the Workingmen’s Party received substantial attention in the local press, and Parsons was blamed for the riots that accompanied the walkouts of different craft unions in Chicago. As the striking continued, crowds of workers assembled for meetings. Women as well as men participated in the struggles between workers and police. There were reports of women’s participation in a skirmish between police and workers that took place at the Halsted Street viaduct and then again at the German workers’ Turner Hall. Articles in newspapers characterized these women as “enraged female rioters . . . the unsexed mob of female incendiaries . . . the Amazonian army” (Tax, 40). On July 25, 1877, a violent confrontation occurred between police officers and “strikers who, a thousand strong, had been heckling a group of scabs” (Avrich, 32) that was brought in to replace striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Works. Two workers were killed by the police and many were beaten. Business and industrial interests in the city were alarmed by the continuation of organized protest, striking, and mounting violence. “Meanwhile additional forces were arriving in the city . . . by July 26, 1877” (Avrich, 33), and the following day the strike was broken. At its annual convention in December 1877, the Workingmen’s Party changed its name to the Socialistic Labor Party of North America (SLP); during the next two years the SLP engaged in political campaigns and won a number of state and municipal elections.

The events of 1877 began the Parsonses’ journey from democratic socialism to anarchism. During the strike, Albert Parsons, who had achieved considerable notoriety, was fired from his typesetting job. When he sought other positions in his craft, he realized he had been blacklisted. Lucy Parsons opened a dress shop and proceeded to support them. Albert Parsons remained on the blacklist for several years; during that time, he took orders for his wife’s shop. In 1878, Lucy Parsons, who had begun to meet other women in the socialist and labor movements, joined with ALZINA PARSONS STEVENS, LIZZIE HOLMES, and ELIZABETH RODGERS to organize Working Women’s Union No. 1 (WWU). The organization, at the time the only women’s union in the city, had almost one thousand members, including women in trades—domestic servants and seamstresses, who made up the majority of the city’s wage earners—and homemakers, the latter predominating. Stevens was the first president and she obtained financial help from the powerful Chicago Typographical Union to organize women into a separate union. Parsons and the others visited workplaces to talk to women and encourage them to organize, and they handed out leaflets. The WWU platform advocated teaching school

children to honor labor, suffrage for women, and equal pay for equal work for women. The WWU joined the eight hour day campaign that was just beginning in Chicago. Albert Parsons was also engaged in the eight hour day campaign.

Lucy Parsons wrote articles for the *Socialist*, the SLP’s newspaper, from 1878 until the paper ceased publication in 1879. Her poem, “A Parody,” printed in the December 7, 1878, edition of the *Socialist*, described her despair over the continued economic depression and the circumstances that pitted workers against the unemployed in the struggle for survival. She defended Civil War veterans who petitioned the government for financial assistance and criticized the newspapers for their negative statements about the former soldiers. She began to criticize the way in which the powerful state engaged soldiers, many from the working class, with patriotic rhetoric. Since the men were no longer needed as soldiers, the government was not interested in providing them with the means to a livelihood. In another article, Parsons wrote about women workers, illustrating the exploitative attitudes prevalent toward domestic workers. While Lucy and Albert Parsons continued to support the more militant labor unions, they also began to believe that workers had to arm themselves in protection against police and military assaults. Such workers’ groups, often organized in groups along ethnic lines and known variously as the *Lehr-und-Wehr Verein* (Education and defense society), Bohemian Sharpshooters, Jaeger Verein, and Irish Labor Guards, alarmed businessmen and industrialists. In 1879, the Illinois legislature passed a law—upheld by the Illinois Supreme Court—banning all paramilitary groups. The question of self-defense was divisive in the SLP, and some groups continued to maintain self-defense societies underground.

On September 14, 1879, Lucy Parsons gave birth to her son, Albert Richard. She continued to write and to speak out for the WWU. In the factional struggles that racked the socialist movement from 1879 to 1881, Lucy Parsons became a speaker for the most militant faction. Lucy and Albert Parsons had initially tried to bring about change through legislative means; Albert had run for political office unsuccessfully from 1877 to 1882—three times for alderman, two times for state assemblyman, and once each for sheriff and county clerk. While there had been some notable electoral victories for SLP candidates, by 1880 many in the SLP, including Albert and Lucy Parsons, questioned whether political activity had any value for the working class. Lucy and Albert Parsons were among the forty-four SLP delegates in attendance at the Greenback–Labor Party nominating convention in Chicago in the summer of 1880. They advocated inserting a socialist program into the Greenback-Labor platform, but were not successful. The Greenback Party, organized after the financial crisis of 1873, had become the Greenback–Labor Party in 1878 when some labor plans had been introduced into its platforms.

Between 1880 and 1883 there was a major shift in the direction and ideology of the SLP. Those in the SLP—including Lucy and Albert Parsons—who were disaffected by corruption and the lack of success of political tactics after 1880 were also disturbed by the increase in state-sponsored violence against labor militancy. The ideas of European revolutionaries like Johann Most, who immigrated to the United States in 1882, and

American social revolutionaries who were forming clubs from 1880, attracted the radical wing of the SLP, which embraced Most's ardent endorsement of direct action. "These social revolutionary clubs formed the embryo of a revolutionary anarchist movement in America. In Chicago [Albert] Parsons was one of the first to affiliate himself with the new organization" (Avrich, 51). He had turned to direct action, calling for strikes, boycotts, union organization and, when necessary, revolutionary action, believing that "no meaningful reform could be obtained within the framework of the capitalist system" (p. 51). Lucy Parsons, whose second child, a daughter, Lulu Eda, was born in 1881, had moved in the same ideological direction and would write extensively on the use of direct action in the class struggle. "Her whole being, said Albert, was 'wrapped up in the progress of the social revolution'" (p. 117).

When Albert Parsons attended a major social revolutionary congress held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in October 1883, his and Lucy Parsons's transformation was complete. Albert Parsons and August Spies, who acted as secretary of the congress, brought a devotion to the cause of trade unionism—"the Chicago idea" (Avrich, 73)—to the meeting and countered the extreme anarchism of other delegates. "For the midwesterners the union was more than a vehicle of class struggle. It was, as [Albert] Parsons described it, 'an autonomous commune in the process of incubation,' the 'embryonic group of the future "free society'" (Avrich, 73). The Pittsburgh congress gave birth to the International Working People's Association (IWPA), which grew from 1883 to the Haymarket explosion of 1886. In Chicago, the new journal for the group, the *Alarm*, was edited by Albert Parsons; Lucy Parsons became one of its writers. She was influenced by Johann Most's call to "'propaganda by the deed,' acts of individualism terrorism" (Ashbaugh, 56). She "argued that a dynamite bomb set off in Westminster Abbey [England] would be 'a shot fired in the center of civilization, whose echoes are heard around the world'" (Ashbaugh, 56). Throughout the 1880s, Albert Parsons earned only eight dollars a week as editor of the *Alarm*. Lucy Parsons continued to run a small ladies' tailor shop, for which she did the sewing and her husband solicited business.

The winter of 1883–84 had been one of the most severe in Chicago memory. An economic depression, not as severe as the one ten years earlier but serious enough—left many unemployed and homeless. Many died of hunger and exposure. Lucy Parsons's article, "To Tramps," published on the front page of the first issue of *Alarm* and later reprinted by the IWPA and distributed as a pamphlet, reflected her intense anger at the society that permitted such injustices. Lucy and Albert Parsons had come to believe "that the wage slaves of 1884 were no better off than the chattel slaves of 1860, and they believed that wage slavery would be defeated in the same way chattel slavery had been defeated. This time, however, a new force was introduced into the configuration: dynamite" (Ashbaugh, 55). Lucy Parsons and other anarchists saw dynamite as a countervailing force to use against state sanctioned violence. If anything, Lucy Parsons was more committed to propaganda by the deed than was Albert, as a result of "all the oppression which . . . [she] suffered for her dark skin and her womanhood" (p. 55).

In part, the adoption of an ideology of propaganda by the deed was a response to the situation in Chicago. A report of the

Citizens' Association in Chicago told "of 'the wretched condition of the tenements into which thousands of workmen are huddled, the wholesale violation of all rules . . . [of] safety . . . the neglect of all laws of health . . . the unwholesome character of their food'" (Avrich, 79–80) and made it clear that workers and the poor lived in unspeakable conditions. At the same time, the clash between labor and capital in the form of strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts became more and more frequent. The IWPA in Chicago and nationwide achieved its greatest strength from the fall of 1885 to the spring of 1886, with "five thousand members" and "three times as many sympathizers and supporters" (Avrich, 83). Chicago was the center of IWPA affiliation.

In this milieu, Lucy Parsons and other women participated in the growing American membership of the IWPA in Chicago, which also included immigrants. The group had Wednesday and Sunday meetings and engaged in many public activities. The American Group sent speakers on the lecture circuit, arranged street parades with placards and banners, and, to raise funds for the *Alarm*, they sponsored picnics, dances, and other entertainments. On April 28, 1885, Lucy Parsons and Lizzie Swank Holmes were at the head of the anarchists' march on the new Board of Trade building. That spring there had been a series of strikes among quarrymen of Lemont, Lockport, and Joliet, Illinois. On May 4, 1885, militia had opened fire on a group of unarmed strikers in Lemont, killing at least two and wounding others. Men and women bystanders were clubbed and bayoneted in the streets. Termed a "massacre" by the anarchists, the Lemont incident was reported by Albert Parsons in the May 5, 1885, *Alarm*. Lucy Parsons achieved notoriety when on May 7, 1885, the *Chicago Tribune* reported her as having stated, "Let every dirty, lousy tramp arm himself with a revolver or knife, and lay in wait on the steps of the palaces of the rich and stab or shoot the owners as they come out. Let us kill them without mercy, and let it be a war of extermination and without pity. Let us devastate the avenues where the wealthy live as Sheridan devastated the beautiful valley of the Shenandoah" (Avrich, 91). In the meantime, the radical labor unions had broken away from the Chicago Trades Assembly, which they deemed too reformist, and established the Central Labor Union. The Central Labor Union contended that there could be no reconciliation or arbitration between capital and labor.

Chicago's two labor coalitions had separate Labor Day celebrations September 6 and 7, 1885. At the former, the moderate Trades Assembly had Mayor Carter Harrison as featured speaker; at the latter, anarchists marched through downtown Chicago, and first in line was a contingent of women (including Lucy Parsons) "in decorated wagons, which bore the slogans: 'Down with Government, God and Gold' and 'Our Civilization: The Bullet and Policeman's Club'" (Avrich, 93). Albert Parsons delivered an impassioned speech addressing a crowd that was estimated to have reached several thousand. On Thanksgiving Day 1885, Lucy Parsons led a march of poor people down Prairie Avenue, the heart of the neighborhood of Chicago's wealthiest capitalists, where Marshall Field and George Pullman had built their stately mansions. Lucy Parsons's brigade rang the doorbells. Such events were part of the "counterculture" (Avrich, 131–49) of the anarchist movement.

“What took place in Chicago on May 4, 1886, was the culmination of passions and prejudices that had been accumulating for several years” (Avrich, 181). The nationwide crusade for the eight hour day, an intense struggle by the American labor movement, even garnered support from the IWPA in Chicago. Albert Parsons had supported the eight hour day movement in the late 1870s, turned against it as a reform that would be irrelevant ultimately to the workers, and again, in 1886, embraced it, realizing how deeply committed workers were and how opposed were employers. On May 1, 1886, “more than 300,000 workers stopped work in 13,000 establishments throughout the country. In Chicago . . . 40,000 went out on strike” (Avrich, 186). Demonstrations and meetings occurred in all parts of Chicago on May Day; one of the most impressive was one organized by the IWPA and Central Labor Union. Lucy and Albert Parsons, accompanied by their two children, “led 80,000 workers up Michigan Avenue, singing and marching arm in arm” (Avrich, 186). The prominence of anarchists in the labor movement troubled Chicago’s establishment, yet May 1 passed without any rioting or disorder. On May 3, however, a bloody encounter occurred between strikers and police at the McCormick Reaper Works. The company had a long history of labor disputes. The year before, the company “had been forced by a strike to restore a 15 percent wage cut in what has been described as ‘the bitterest’ labor-management struggle in the company’s history” (Avrich, 188). Cyrus H. McCormick Jr. had told the press, “The right to hire any man, white or black, union or non-union, Protestant or Catholic, is something I will not surrender” (Avrich, 188).

Following the May 3 clash, a meeting at Haymarket Square was called for May 4. That day a large crowd of two to three thousand people gathered. Albert Parsons, who was attending a meeting of the American Group in the offices of *Alarm*, was called on to speak and did so after August Spies. Mayor Carter Harrison, who had been notified earlier in the day of the planned Haymarket meeting, had joined the crowd and was in the audience when Spies spoke. Parsons, with his wife Lucy and others from the American Group, arrived at Haymarket while Spies was still speaking. Parsons was introduced as the next speaker, and given the general sentiment of the moment, he was “surprisingly temperate” (Avrich, 202) and “concluded by declaring that the only hope of the workers lay in socialism. . . . He called on his listeners to make every effort to secure the eight-hour day, to defend their rights and liberties, and above all ‘to combine, to unite, for in union there is strength!’” (Avrich, 202–203). Mayor Harrison was convinced of the harmless character of the meeting and decided to leave after Parsons concluded his speech. He told Captain John Bonfield, the police officer in charge of the nearby Desplains Street station, that the meeting was quiet and probably would not require any intervention or additional personnel.

Parsons introduced the last speaker, Samuel Fielden, who spoke for about ten minutes; suddenly the weather changed and it looked like rain. People began to leave and Albert Parsons called out that the meeting should adjourn to Zepf’s Hall, a tavern half a block north. Someone announced that another group was at Zepf’s, so Fielden announced he would finish in a few minutes and then the crowd should go home. Bonfield led 180 police in an attempt to break up what had been a peaceable and

orderly meeting, one that was almost over. Moments later, after the arrival of Bonfield and the police, a bomb exploded, sparking a police riot. Eight policemen died as a result of the bombing and the crossfire among police. In the disorder that followed the bomb explosion, an undetermined number of demonstrators lost their lives. The authorities never did determine the identity of the person who threw the bomb. Eight anarchists were tried and received guilty verdicts for conspiracy to murder policeman Mathias Degan, who died at Haymarket. Four defendants—August Spies, Albert Parsons, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer—were executed by hanging. A fifth condemned anarchist, Louis Lingg, committed suicide in jail; Oscar Neebe, Samuel Fielden, and Michael Schwab remained in jail until released in 1893 by Illinois governor John Peter Altgeld. His “pardon message acknowledged the injustice of the trial” (Roediger, 297).

Lucy Parsons was arrested three times on May 5, 1886. Police arrested August Spies and Michael Schwab early that morning. Initially she was arrested at the *Alarm* office; police released her in hopes that she would lead them to Albert. They arrested her a second time when she was with her children in a friend’s apartment. Released, she was arrested a third time that evening and then released again later that night. She immediately sent out circulars to all IWPA sections telling them about the Haymarket and related events and asking them for donations to defend the Chicago comrades.

The trial of the Haymarket eight was conspicuously biased against the defendants; witnesses testified that Parsons, Fischer, Schwab, Engel, Lingg, and Neebe were at the scene when the bomb was thrown. In reality, only Spies and Fielden were at the scene, and neither of them threw the bomb. The atmosphere surrounding the trial was supercharged; the prosecution put anarchist ideas on trial and introduced inflammatory articles that had been written by the defendants for *Alarm*, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, and *Vorbote*. Lucy Parsons’s “To Tramps” was introduced by the prosecution as People’s Exhibit No. 18. On August 20, 1886, the verdict was announced after the jury had deliberated for three hours. When the sentencing was over, Lucy Parsons pledged to tell the American people that a miscarriage of justice had been done. She and her children had been evicted from their apartment because they did not have rent money. Soon her son was sent to stay with friends in Waukesha, Wisconsin, and her daughter with friends in another state. Lucy Parsons immediately began a seven-week tour to gain support and raise funds to appeal the case. “With the execution set for December 3, the defense committee worked feverishly for a stay of execution and a new trial” (Ashbaugh, 105). Parsons traveled to the East and spoke to Knights of Labor Assemblies, to IWPA locals, and to other socialist, anarchist, and labor gatherings. In March 1887, Lucy Parsons again traveled east to raise money for the defense since the case had gone to the Illinois Supreme Court. The appeal was unsuccessful.

Immediately after Albert Parsons’s death, Parsons published his *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis* (1887), written while he was in prison awaiting execution. She did so not only as an organizing tool but from economic necessity. Lucy Parsons also received financial support from the Chicago Pioneer Benefit and Aid Association, established to help the fami-

lies of the Haymarket martyrs. The society loaned Parsons \$593 to expedite her publishing project and set up a fund to give all the Haymarket widows \$8 a week and a few additional dollars for each child. (The fund continued to give money to the families for eight years.) On October 13, 1889, Lula Eda, Lucy Parsons's eight-year-old daughter, died of a disease of the lymph glands. This condition may have been brought on by the scarlet fever that she had in 1886.

Parsons regarded her writing and public speaking as a continuation of the work that her comrades could not finish. As early as 1888, Parsons saw herself as a movement historian. Writing in *Alarm* September 22, 1888, she stated that "future generations will prize every detail in the history of these fast-moving years; the movement toward a higher civilization needs a correct presentation of facts[,] and the veil of prejudice, which an unrelenting ruling class has woven about the events of the past two years, must be torn aside before it shapes into tradition" (p. 2). She wrote about the movement in *Freedom: A Revolutionary Communist-Anarchist Monthly*, edited by Lizzie Swank Holmes and Parsons. The first issue, November 11, 1890, included excerpts from a lecture, "Communism: Its Historical Development," delivered by Parsons at the reopening of the American Group's weekly IWPA meeting. Parsons described the evolution of communism and concluded with a brief history of the International Working People's Association, identifying Albert Parsons, August Spies, and Johann Most as the leaders of this new movement. Lucy Parsons published the autobiographies of Albert Parsons and August Spies in serialized form in the magazine *Freedom*, from December 1890 to May 1891, in hopes of preserving the legacy of the Haymarket martyrs.

Lucy Parsons began to write about race issues in a January 1891 article in *Freedom*. She commended the Colored Farmers' Alliance of Florida for its strong call for land ownership, arguing that land is not property but belongs to those who live on it and improve it. "Are the 'ignorant' negroes to teach 'intelligent' white people a lesson in basic principles?" (p. 3) she asked rhetorically. Writing about Southern lynchings in April 1892, she compared these atrocities to reports of pogroms against Jews in Russia. Parsons called for Blacks to organize a revolution around the "spirit of martyrdom" ("Southern Lynchings," *Freedom*, April 1892, 2). She acknowledged that many might die but argued that this was the only way social change would occur. Lucy Parsons's analysis of racism in American society came from her identification with the oppressed and marginalized, not from a position as a race woman who proclaimed that her own liberation was tied to the liberation of her race, as did IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT. (Wells-Barnett was an anti-lynching crusader who, by 1893, was living in Chicago and writing passionately against the brutalities and injustices experienced by Blacks in the South.) In other articles Parsons advocated that the poor reject charity and take what was rightfully theirs as producers; she criticized Socialist Party leaders, in particular Thomas J. Morgan, who advocated on behalf of skilled labor at the expense of unskilled labor; she noted the growing disparity between rich and poor.

Lucy Parsons opposed the Spanish-American War in 1898, calling it a war of imperialism and discouraging young men from enlisting. Her public antiwar campaign occurred at a time

when she opposed her own son's enlistment in the army. Albert Parsons Jr. had also taken an interest in religion, attending church services and becoming involved in the Spiritualist movement. Parsons determined that he was mentally ill and decided to have him committed to the Illinois Northern Hospital for the Insane, appearing in court on July 27, 1899, to testify to his insanity. The court accepted Lucy Parsons's reasoning, declared him insane, and issued a warrant for his arrest; he was admitted to the hospital on July 31, 1899. Although one of the hospital doctors who examined Albert Jr. found him to be normal physically and mentally, after his admission he deteriorated. Harassed by patients and hospital personnel because of his parents' political activities, he remained uncooperative and was put in confinement and in restraints. He remained at Illinois Northern for the next twenty years, until his death from tuberculosis on August 15, 1919. Lucy Parsons was criticized by associates in the radical movement, including Emma Goldman, for what was perceived as mistreatment of her son. Goldman felt that Parsons had driven Albert Jr. "into the army and then had him put in a lunatic asylum" (Ashbaugh, 208). Ashbaugh concludes that "there must have been a long history of conflict between Lucy and Albert Jr., most of it unknown due to Lucy's refusal to discuss her private life. What remains is that she committed him to the mental institution. She had put her political commitments first and had attempted to make . . . [him] a part of her larger political vision" (Ashbaugh, 208).

In the years after Haymarket the anarchist ideas of the Pittsburgh Manifesto and the IWPA lost popularity and the movement splintered. Lucy Parsons's dominant interest was in maintaining a press where the ideas of revolutionary socialism and the legacy of the Chicago anarchists could be kept alive. Beyond this action, as she wrote, "There [was] no way of building up a movement, strengthening it and keeping it intact, except by a press, at least weeklies, if dailies are impossible" ("The Importance of a Press," *Liberator*, April 14, 1906, 2). Parsons continued to participate in the counterculture of the movement and worked hard to represent the Haymarket tradition. The *Alarm* continued to be produced during the Haymarket trial and appeal and after the execution of the Haymarket defendants. Dyer D. Lum continued as editor; Lucy Parsons disagreed with his policies, believing that his views on anarchism did not represent the political position of the American Group of the IWPA. He had moved to New York and had taken the newspaper with him. From 1890 to 1892, Lucy Parsons published and edited *Freedom: A Revolutionary Communist-Anarchist Monthly*, personally raising money to keep it alive so that she could continue to define the meaning of Haymarket. Her articles on the horrors of lynching and on women's oppression were always written in the context of the philosophy of revolutionary socialism. Next Parsons wrote the Chicago column for *Free Society*, edited by Abe Isaak and published from 1897 to 1904 in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. After the assassination of President William McKinley in September 1901 by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz, the Chicago police destroyed the *Free Society* press and arrested members of the *Free Society* publishing group, but not Parsons, who had been interviewed by a reporter and had said, "Nothing could be worse for the cause of anarchism. What is the use to strike individuals? That is not true anarchy. Another

ruler rises to take his place and no good is accomplished" (Ashbaugh, 211). By 1905, Parsons had begun to edit the *Liberator*. It lasted one year. In that time Parsons wrote about industrial unionism and argued for the relevance of the philosophy of anarchism for the working-class struggle. As she had in the past, Parsons included speeches and writings of her husband and historical overviews of the labor movement that supported the Haymarket tradition.

In 1905, Lucy Parsons, together with labor leaders Mother Jones and Bill Haywood and socialist Eugene Victor Debs, took part in the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Chicago. Jones was the first woman and Parsons the second to join the IWW. Parsons came to the convention as, in her words, "the representative of the most oppressed of humanity, child laborers and prostitutes — 'my sisters whom I can see in the night when I go out in Chicago'" (Ashbaugh, 217). She addressed the convention after speeches were delivered by Debs, socialist Daniel DeLeon, and others. Parsons "called for a program of 'revolutionary socialism' that would usher in a society in which 'the land shall belong to the landless, the tools to the toilers, and the product to the producers'" (Avrich, 452). In contrast to her earlier writings, in which she justified the need to use violence in opposition to an intransigent capitalist class, Parsons now stressed that when the workers decide to take what is rightfully theirs, there will be no need for armed violence. She advocated the use of the general strike where workers, instead of walking off their jobs and then starving, would take possession of the property needed for production.

Parsons was the only woman to speak at the IWW's founding convention in 1905. Her words pointed to the lack of women's participation and, spontaneously, the leaders called for Mother Jones to speak. She was absent from the hall at the time of the belated invitation and did not appear at the podium. Parsons, however, was not interested in what she understood as the bourgeois woman suffrage movement. Although she admired Susan B. Anthony and even printed in *Liberator*, November 5, 1905, the report on industrial conditions of working women done by the Chicago Woman's Club, she maintained her earliest position on the subject — that equal rights for women would happen only when revolutionary socialism established the new society. When Susan B. Anthony died March 12, 1906, Parsons editorialized, "It is unnecessary for us to agree with her in the field of reform which she mapped out for herself. . . . We can at any rate admire the sterling qualities of the woman herself" (*Liberator*, March 18, 1906, 2). Parsons wrote, "If the economic question had been a factor in American life at the beginning of Miss Anthony's career, she might have devoted her life to that cause, for she was a progressive thinker" (p. 2), a statement revealing far more about Parsons's lack of experience with or understanding of the woman suffrage movement than about the nature of Anthony's contribution. Writing in an earlier edition of her paper, Parsons took an optimistic view of the progress of the "new woman," stating, "I know of no activity from which woman is debarred because of her sex" (*Liberator*, September 3, 1905, 3).

At the same time that women activists decried the slow progress in the workplace and the lack of change in the political sphere, Parsons saw the American woman as having made enor-

mous strides. "In America, woman competes with man not only in the factory but in the store, the office, the classroom, in jurisprudence, in medics, in positions of public trust. Woman is fast becoming the ruling sex. Whether that ever will extend to political power only time can tell" (*Liberator*, September 3, 1905, 3). To a large extent this question of whether or not women would obtain the vote was an academic one for Parsons, who never changed her attitude toward electoral politics once she and Albert Parsons abandoned it after 1880 as a viable strategy for workers. Parsons was much more concerned about what role working women would take in the struggle between labor and capital. Using an argument employed by traditional trade union men, Parsons claimed that "woman is allowing herself to be used to reduce the standard of life by working for lower wages than those demanded by men" (p. 3). Nor did Parsons join the newly formed Women's Trade Union League, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, an organization she and other revolutionary socialists deplored.

In 1910, Lucy Parsons reprinted *The Famous Speeches of the Eight Chicago Anarchists in Court* and added pamphlets by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, works of Peter Kropotkin, and her own "Principles of Anarchism." Parsons met William Z. Foster, an IWW member who later was president of the Communist Party, United States of America, and who founded the Syndicalist League of North America. "Participation in the labor movement presented revolutionaries with a paradox" (Barrett, "Dual Unionism," 200). Unions were organizations that were reformist rather than radical by nature. They worked to improve workers' conditions within the system. It was difficult for revolutionaries to function within unions, but these organizations were where the organized working class was concentrated. Foster's syndicalism was "an alternative to dual unionism," and he argued "that the mainstream unions could indeed be radicalized but only through long-term agitation by a 'militant minority' within the regular trade union organizations. Foster and his group developed their critique of dual unionism first within the IWW and then through a series of organizations they formed between 1911 and 1920" (Barrett, "Dual Unionism," 201). Lucy Parsons supported Foster's efforts and gave lectures across the country in support of syndicalism; but by 1914 the league, which had never achieved a mass following, had dissolved.

The political climate had changed since the 1880s, and Lucy Parsons had difficulty connecting with the next generation of activists. Her absorption in the history and martyrdom of her husband had kept her motivated; but it failed to create new alliances and contributed to a stereotyping of her as the widow from a bygone era, no longer relevant. When events brought workers into the streets, however, Lucy Parsons continued to participate in and support actions that dramatized the plight of marginalized workers, the unemployed, the homeless, and the hungry. The winter of 1915 was a difficult one for many workers who lost jobs when factories closed because the war in Europe had drastically cut the foreign market for American goods. In Chicago the unemployed marched in the streets. Lucy Parsons had resumed editing and publishing the *Liberator* and reported on the conditions of the working class. On January 17, 1915, Parsons was one of many speakers at a meeting of the unemployed

at a local assembly hall not far from the Hull-House settlement. The hall was crowded to capacity, and there were banners “held aloft here and there in the crowd,” some bearing the word ‘Hunger’ in huge letters . . . others decorated with the Lord’s Prayer, with ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ typed out conspicuously” (“Police Club Unemployed”). Parsons was reported to have told the crowd, “As long as you accept charity, capitalists will not give you work!” (“Police Club Unemployed”). Following the speeches, the crowd began to form a procession outside the hall but was immediately accosted by mounted and foot police officers who had rushed to the neighborhood of Hull-House. Women and men marchers were indiscriminately knocked down as the police used their clubs; twenty-two of the marchers were arrested, seven of them women, including Lucy Parsons.

The social reformers at Hull-House came to the defense of Lucy Parsons, who was portrayed by the authorities as a dangerous woman who had incited the crowd to violence and encouraged them to attack the police. MARY WILMARTH provided bail for eight of the group—including Parsons—who had been arrested and charged with rioting, unlawful assemblage, and parading without a permit. JANE ADDAMS and SOPHONISBA BRECKINRIDGE helped secure jury trials for the defendants; Addams arranged for attorneys, and Addams, Breckinridge, and birth control advocate RACHELLE YARROS, also associated with Hull-House, testified in behalf of Lucy Parsons and the other defendants on January 28, 1915. Breckinridge told the press, “Mrs. Parsons said nothing that would start a riot. . . . She merely explained that labor is different from other commodities; that if it isn’t sold one day, it cannot be held in stock and sold the next” (“Hunger Marchers Face Trial”).

The defense argued that the courts had invalidated the Chicago city ordinance that gave the police chief the right to license street parades and won the case. The police chief then obtained a ruling from the city’s corporation counsel that gave the head of the police department discretionary powers to issue parade permits. The protesters and their supporters planned their next demonstration; as ELLEN GATES STARR of Hull-House told reporters, “The unemployed would not ask for a permit from police” since “they have a court decision to justify them now” (Ashbaugh, 242). When a meeting to discuss whether or not to march was held at Hull-House January 31, Jane Addams admonished the crowd to be content with the victory they had won in the courts. “Lucy Parsons stood at the door shouting to the people, ‘Come on! March! March!’” (Ashbaugh, 242) and “600 people marched through the rain and slush determined to test their court victory for the free use of the streets” (p. 242). As a result of Lucy Parsons’s leadership, joined by the anarchists of Chicago’s West Side, many interests from the liberal and reform community focused on the unemployment crisis. The Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), the Socialist Party, and Hull-House called a mass demonstration for February 12, 1915, Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. Jane Addams and Lucy Parsons worked together to plan the event, and Parsons was appointed to the arrangements committee with John Fitzpatrick, head of the CFL, and others. This was not a sign, however, that Parsons had joined what she perceived to be the nonrevolutionary reformist labor and political movements.

She continued to campaign wherever the most marginalized workers were fighting for their rights: in the summer of 1916 with striking iron miners at the Mesabi Range, Minnesota; in support of Tom Mooney, the union organizer who was sentenced to death for a bomb explosion that killed ten people during a Preparedness Day parade in San Francisco, California, July 16, 1916; in 1917 in support of Cassius Cook, arrested for his antiwar work as secretary of the League of Humanity (Parsons’s house was used as collateral to cover the last seven thousand dollars of his bond). Passage of the Espionage Act in 1917 and the Sedition Act in 1918 during wartime put all radicals at risk of prison, or of deportation if they were not born in the United States or were not naturalized citizens. Antiradical hysteria made all antiwar and radical labor activities dangerous. The U.S. Postal Service denied hundreds of radical publications access to the mails; among the suppressed publications was the *Liberator*. Bill Haywood and one hundred other IWW members were tried in 1918 on conspiracy charges and all of the men were convicted and sentenced to prison. The entire executive committee of the Socialist Party was indicted under the Espionage Act but never brought to trial. Eugene Victor Debs was convicted for an antiwar speech made in Canton, Ohio, and was sent to the federal penitentiary. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were deported to Russia on December 21, 1919.

At the same time that the government pursued the imprisonment or deportation of those deemed subversive, culminating in the Palmer Raids of the 1920s led by U.S. Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, revolutionaries gained ground worldwide with the seizure of power in Russia by the Bolsheviks on November 7, 1917. In 1921, the Workers’ Party of America, which became the Communist Party, USA (CP), was formed. Lucy Parsons and other anarchists had to decide whether or not Bolshevism in the Soviet Union was the implementation of their vision or even the initial stage of what would lead to a socialist society. Lucy Parsons shared William Z. Foster’s enthusiasm for communism. She saw the Communist Party as “the legitimate successor to prior radical movements” (Ashbaugh, 251) and found that the CP “adopted the history of the Haymarket Affair and the Eight Hour Movement as its history” (p. 251). In 1927, Parsons attended the second annual convention of the International Labor Defense (ILD), a coalition founded by CP members in 1925; she was elected vice-chair of the convention and a member of its National Committee, which included Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Ella Reeve Bloor.

Forty-four years after her appearance in the 1886 May Day parade in Chicago, she spoke again on May 1, 1930, to a crowd of thousands. The stock market had crashed six months before, and working people were beginning to feel the impact of unemployment. By 1934, she was depressed about the possibilities for revolutionary change: “I have nothing worthwhile to write about. We radicals get together in our little groups, talk to each other, and go home. The Roosevelt wind has blown the radical movement to Hell!” (Ashbaugh, 256). She realized that anarchism was a dead issue in the United States, and she saw in the rise of Adolph Hitler in Germany a tremendous threat to world radicalism. She continued to travel and lecture in the 1930s, although she was losing her sight. In Chicago, young radicals came to see her, for she “had become a legend in her own time

and a folk hero of Communist Party youth" (Ashbaugh, 260). Even the Chicago newspapers that had regarded her as a threat to society published articles about her in 1936, the fiftieth anniversary of the Haymarket police riot. The next year, Parsons spoke in Chicago on the fiftieth anniversary of the execution of her husband, November 11, 1937, "concluding, 'Oh, Misery, I have drunk thy cup of sorrow to its dregs, but I am still a rebel'" (Ashbaugh, 260). That year International Publishers, the Communist Party press, published *Labor Agitator: The Story of Albert R. Parsons* by Alan Calmer. Alexander Trachtenberg, head of International Publishers, persuaded Lucy Parsons to join the CP in 1939. She continued to be active, and one of her last public appearances was to speak to strikers at International Harvester, successor to the McCormick Reaper Works, where police brutality in 1886 had prompted the Haymarket protest meeting. She made comparisons and spoke about how police and employer brutality were realities still. On March 7, 1942, there was a fire in the small house on Chicago's North Side where Lucy Parsons lived with George Markstall, her longtime partner, who died trying to save her. The fire had started in the wood-burning stove. When her friends arrived at her house the next day to retrieve her personal books—close to three thousand volumes—and papers, they could find only a few badly damaged books. The rest of the collection and her papers were gone. Neither the FBI nor the Red Squad accepted responsibility for their disappearance. She was cremated and her ashes were buried at the monument for the Haymarket martyrs, Forest Home Cemetery, Forest Park, Illinois.

Lucy Parsons was twenty when she arrived in Chicago in 1873. She had already witnessed what racism and injustice meant for people of color in her native state of Texas. She propelled herself into the labor movement at a time when workers had embryonic organizations and little standing in the law courts or with the public. The early years of organizing trade unions for working women and men, and, with her husband, Albert Parsons, of attempting change through participation in the political system, convinced her that the class struggle was central to workers' liberation; she contended that workers could obtain justice only when they took the means of production into their own hands and that no establishment would transfer power peacefully because it was voted out of office. Although Parsons entered into coalitions with groups and organizations that did not subscribe completely to her revolutionary program, she held fast to her anarchist vision of a worker's commonwealth. She refused to allow the passage of time to erase the memory of her husband and fought valiantly to narrate his life and the history of anarchism so that in losing the battle to save his life, she could win the ultimate victory of constructing the popular version of the events of Haymarket. In this effort she achieved a measure of success.

Sources. The Labadie Collection at the Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, contains letters of Lucy Parsons and other important anarchists involved in the Haymarket case; UIC Spec. Coll. has the Ben L. Reitman Papers, which include letters from Lucy Parsons. CHS has a rich collection of Haymarket materials. NL has a good selection from the radical press. The State Hist. Soc. of Wisconsin, Madison, has the papers of Albert R. Parsons. Lucy Parsons's articles are in *Socialist* (1878–79), *Alarm* (1884–89), *Freedom: An Anarchist-Communist Monthly* (1890–92),

Firebrand (1895–97), *Free Society* (1897–1904), and *Liberator* (1905–1906, 1915–17); they are the major source for her theoretical positions as well as for reports on movement activities, the culture of the anarchist community, and her interpretation of events and people in politics, reform, and the labor movement more generally. Her publications include the following works that she edited: *The Life of Albert R. Parsons, with Brief History of the Labor Movement in America* (1889); *Altgeld's Reasons for Pardoning Fielden, Schwab and Nebbe* (1915); and *The Famous Speeches of the Eight Chicago Anarchists in Court* (1910, reprinted 1969, 1994). See "Hunger Marchers Face Trial in Chicago Today," *Republican* [Springfield, Missouri], January 28, 1915, and "Police Club Unemployed in Riot at Hull-House," *New York World*, January 18, 1915, for a discussion of her protest activity with the unemployed. Books that are useful include Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (1976); Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (1984); Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880–1917* (1980); Bruce Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870–1900* (1988). Helpful are articles by James R. Barrett, "Dual Unionism" and "Syndicalist League of North America"; David Roediger, "Haymarket Incident"; and Paul Buhle, "Socialist Labor Party," all in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas (1992). Biographies of Lucy Parsons have to deal with the identity question. Ashbaugh's position has already been described. Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enriquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (1979) consider her a Chicana. Robin D. G. Kelley, "Lucy Parsons (1853–1942)," in *BWA*, says Parsons was of African, Indian, and Mexican ancestry.

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