Becoming a Detective: Historical Case File #3—Silent Sentinels

At the request of the textbook committee your class has been asked to investigate whether Hazel Hunkins deserves to be included in the next edition of the textbook. This case cannot be solved without looking at the role of the National Woman’s Party (NWP), its relationship with President Wilson, and the NWP’s most visible campaign tactic: organizing “silent sentinels” to picket the White House. As a member of the commission selected to review the case, your job is to examine the following documents to determine how the NWP strategists used this tactic to escalate pressure on President Wilson, and what effect it had.

• Why did the NWP decide to picket the White House?
• How effective was this tactic?

Step 1: Review Background Information

In 1920 suffragist Doris Stevens wrote *Jailed for Freedom*, a book about the woman’s suffrage movement from the perspective of someone active in the cause. In it, she remembered attending the meeting where the National Woman’s Party decided to picket the White House. It occurred right after the suffragists had met with President Woodrow Wilson to plead their case. The President told them that he had little power to advance woman’s suffrage because he did not control the political agenda and could not force change. The suffragists were outraged by what they believed was the President’s unwillingness to act. As Harriet Stanton Blatch, the daughter of renowned suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, saw the situation:

“‘Never before did the Democratic Party lie more in the hands of one man than it lies today in the hands of President Wilson. Never did the Democratic Party have a greater leader, and never was it more susceptible to the wish of that leader, than is the Democratic Party of today to President Wilson. He controls his party, and I don’t think he is too modest to know it. He can mould it as he wishes and he has moulded it. He moulded it quickly before election in the matter of the eight-hour law. Was that in his party platform? He had to crush and force his party to pass that measure. Yet he is not willing to lay a finger’s weight on his party today for half the people of the United States . . . . Yet today he tells us that we must wait more—and more.’”

Stanton Blatch continued, proposing a new line of action:

“‘We can’t organize bigger and more influential deputations. We can’t organize bigger processions. We can’t, women, do anything more in that line. We have got to take a new departure. We have got to keep the question before him all the time. We have got to begin and begin immediately.

“‘Women, it rests with us. We have got to bring to the President, individually, day by day, week in and week out, the idea that great numbers of women want to be free, will be free, and want to know what he is going to do about it.

“‘Won’t you come and join us in standing day after day at the gates of the White House with banners asking, “What will you do, Mr. President, for one-half the people of this nation?” Stand there as sentinels—sentinels of liberty, sentinels of self-government—silent sentinels. Let us stand beside the gateway where he must pass in and out, so that he can never fail to realize that there is a tremendous earnestness and insistence back of this measure. Will you not show your allegiance today to this ideal of liberty? Will you not be a silent sentinel of liberty and self-government?’”

According to Stevens, “Deliberations continued. Details were settled. Three thousand dollars was raised in a few minutes among
these women, fresh from the President’s re-
buff. No one suggested waiting until the next
Presidential campaign. No one even men-
tioned the fact that time was precious, and we
could wait no longer. Everyone seemed to feel these
things without troubling to put them into
words. Volunteers signed up for sentinel duty
and the fight was on.” (From Doris Stevens,
Jailed for Freedom, New York: Liveright
Publishing, 1920, pp. 58-60. Available at
https://books.google.com/books?id=ASoEAAAYAAJ&source=gbsnavlinks_s)

Step 2: Investigate the Evidence
Expect to spend about ten minutes on each
of the sources in your packet, available online
here: http://mhs.mt.gov/education/women/
HazelHunkins.

Exhibit 3-A Hand-written letter: Hazel
Hunkins to Mother, January 1917, Hazel
Hunkins-Hallinan Papers, MC 532, box 80,
folder 1, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute

Exhibit 3-B Photograph: “Women Voters
Day on the Picket Line,” February 14, 1917,
National Woman's Party Records, Group I,
Container I:160, Folder: Pickets, 1917, Library
of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
Washington, D.C. http://www.loc.gov/item/
mnwp000208/

Exhibit 3-C Photograph: “Penn[sylvania] on the
Picket Line, 1917,” Harris and Ewing, photog-
rapher. Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of
Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
Washington, D.C. http://www.loc.gov/item/
mnwp000212/

Exhibit 3-D Newspaper article: “Wilson Runs
Gauntlet of ‘Suff’ Guards,” Washington Times
(Washington, D.C.), January 10, 1917

Exhibit 3-E Newspaper article: “Angry Men
Tear Up Women’s Banners,” New Iberia
Enterprise (New Iberia, Louisiana), June 23,
1917

For each source, answer all the questions on
the Document Analysis Worksheet. Note: You
will be sharing these answers with your
class in an “exhibit” format—so write
legibly!

Step 3: Crack the Case
Based on your analysis of the documents and
citing evidence to support your answer, please
create a presentation to share with the other
members of the textbook committee (your
class). You may use technology if you wish and,
for your convenience, we have provide im-
ages of all the documents you examined in a
PowerPoint, available for download at http://
mhs.mt.gov/education/women/HazelHunkins.
However you structure your presentation, it
should answer the following questions:

1. Who were the Silent Sentinels and what
were they trying to accomplish?

2. Was posting Silent Sentinels an effective tac-
tic? What evidence did you find that supports
your belief?

3. Why did people attack the picketing suffrag-
ists? Did issues beyond suffrage play a role in
the attack? If so, what issues?

4. How does the material you analyzed relate
to Hazel Hunkins and the committee’s larger
question: whether she should be included in
the next edition of the textbook?

Make sure to include in your report:
• Specific examples! Quote from the
documents.
• Information about where and how the
documents contradicted each other (if this
occurred) and how you decided which ones to
trust.
• A list of any additional questions you still
have that were left unanswered through your
investigation.

After your presentation is complete, organize
your material into an “exhibit” so your fellow committee members can easily access your evidence when creating their briefs. Your exhibit must include your answers to the following questions:

• What is the source called?
• Who created it?
• When was it created? How soon after the event it describes?
• Who was the audience for this document?
• Why was it created?
• Did you find evidence of bias or point of view? If so, what?
• How do these factors affect the source’s credibility?
I am almost sure now that I’ll be here until after March 4th or inauguration. The enclosed clippings will explain the activity of the “picket line” and be sure that we are working up a big convention for the 1st-4th of March. There is an immeasurable amount of work to do in Wash. and the field is not as important at present.

You know doubt are wondering about the White House picket, and probably think it is ridiculous and atrocious. It is justified in this way. For at least 3 days and intermittently from noon on until inauguration, the attention of the public from east to coast has been riveted on the federal amendment and whereas, in ordinary routine, no one would ever mention it, this has lined people up as for a fight which is much better than not having sides taken at all. And most of all it has called everyone’s attention to Pres. W. attitude. We know the picketing won’t change his mind but the public opinion concerned by it will have its affect on him and Pres. W.
is very much affected by public opinion. During the picket, by comments and conversations of the passing throng, we have a wonderful opportunity to see people's opinion of the President, and I never supposed a man could be so hated in the town which knows him best. I believe if the District had the franchise that it would have gone 100,000 against Wilson.

I am still doing work in the Treas. office, but little by little, I am edging my way into the Suffragist office which is my goal if I am to stay here. I am in the picked line a good part of every day, and going to write up my experiences.

Last night I was up to the Mac Rayes to dinner. They are so interesting that, not as radical as many people, I meet here. I love the radicals. They get to the base of things, and have the courage of their convictions.

I'll try and write a couple of this week, but I am so busy!

The enclosed is in payment of the 1st payment I borrowed. It's not alone; you've got Schagie.

Oceans of love. I wish you were here to feel and think by the same stimulus I am.
Private

I am so sorry about your foot troubles! It seems terrible that such a small thing apparently could cause such pain etc.

I feel that this new work is a great big step off the beaten path, but never have I regretted it even when I was most dissatisfied. There is so much gained and so little lost by the new view. I am going places and meeting people, and doing things that make life interesting and I think that what I am gaining is so much more than I could any other way. Boos, where I've been and what I've done & who I've met that -- we'll say Esther or Catherine have not -- since last Sept. Compare my life the last five months with anyone in Boz and you'll see how much I have to be thankful for. Why? I wouldn't take anything for my experiences.

I say these things because I feel that your unhappiness is largely dissatisfaction with me and you shouldn't be so. I am the most fortunate girl in Billings. And briefly -- I'm planning to be home next summer.

Just faint at the enclosed check! And heaps of love to the dearest person on earth. Take care of Edith!
Dear Little Mother,

I am almost sure now that I’ll be here until after March 4th or inauguration. The enclosed clippings will explain the activity of the “picket line” and beside that we are working up a big convention for the 1st-4th of March. There is an immeasurable amt. of work to do in Wash. and the “field” is not so important at present. After March 4th, goodness knows where I’ll be!

You know doubt are wondering about the “White House picket”, and probably think it is ridiculous and atrocious. It is justified in this way. For at least 3 days and intermittently from now on until inauguration, the attention of the public from coast to coast has been riveted as the federal amendment; whereas, in ordinary routine, no one would ever mention it. It has lined people up as for or against it which is much better than not having sides taken at all. And, most of all it has called everyone’s attention to Pres. W. attitude. We know the picketing won’t change him, but the public opinion concerted by it will have its affect on him and Pres. W. is very much affected by public opinion.

During the picket, by comments and conversations of the passing throng, we have a wonderful opportunity to see peoples’ opinion of the Pres., and I never supposed a man could be so hated in the town which knows him best. I believe if the District had the franchise that it would have gone 100,000 against Wilson.

I am still doing work in the Treas. Office, but little by little I am edging my way into the Suffragist Office, which is my goal if I am to stay here. I am on the picket line a good part of every day. I am going to write up my experiences.

Last night I was up to the MacKay’s to dinner. They are so interesting, tho not as radical as many people I meet here. I love the radicals. They get to the base of things, and have the courage of their convictions.

I’ll try and write a 2nd time this week, but I am so busy! The enclosed is in payment of the 1st pension I borrowed. Don’t be lonesome; you’ve got Schazie. Oceans of love. I wish you were here to feel and think by the same stimuli as I am!

Hazel

Private

I am oh so sorry about your foot troubles! It seems terrible that such a small thing apparently could cause such pain, etc.

I feel that this new work is a great big step off the beaten path, but never have I regretted it, even when I was most dissatisfied. There is so much gained and so little
lost by the new view pt. I am going places and meeting people, and doing things that make life interesting and I think that what I am gaining is so much more than I could any other way. Look, where I’ve been and what I’ve done and who I’ve met that—we’ll say Esther or Catherine have not—since last Sept. Compare my life the last five months with anyone in Bgs and you’ll see how much I have to be thankful for. Why, I wouldn’t take anything for my experiences.

I say these things because I feel that your dumpiness [?] is largely dissatisfaction with me and you—shouldn’t be so. I am the most fortunate girl in Billings, and hazily I’m planning to be home next summer.

Don’t faint at the enclosed check! And heaps of love to the dearest person on earth—take care of Schazie.
Historical Case File #3—Silent Sentinels


Note: The lead woman carrying the American flag and wearing a sash that reads “Voter” is Hazel Hunkins.
Historical Case File #3—Silent Sentinels

President Wilson runs gauntlet of ‘Suff’ Guards

President Smiles as His Car Passes Through Line of Silent Sentinels.

Picket White House Gates

“Mild Militants” Flout Pennants Demanding President Aid Votes for Women.

“Silent sentinels,” a dozen of them, each bearing yellow banners inscribed “Mr. President, How Long Must Women Wait?” are pacing back and forth in front of the two Avenue entrances to the White House grounds today, in the campaign being waged by the suffragists to force the President to give a definite answer to the question asked of him yesterday, when 300 or more of them visited the Chief Executive in the East Room of the Executive Mansion.

The twelve women will remain on duty till 8 o’clock tonight. Whenever the President leaves the White House before that hour, he will see one of these sentinels and her blazing banner.

At each of the two entrances, six suffragists are located. They are saying nothing to the crowds of curious attracted by their presence. Like the sentry on guard at an army post, they are apparently oblivious to their surroundings.

An hour after the time fixed for their arrival—9 o’clock—the sentinels reached the Executive Mansion. They made no effort to get to the White House. They remained on the sidewalks outside the entrance gates, and waited.

Every day, Sundays and holidays included, for an indefinite period, the sentinels will guard the entrances to the White House grounds.

White House officials warned,

They will be on duty but eight hours out of each twenty-four, however, and will be relieved at regular intervals. Every minute of the time between 10 o’clock in the morning and 8 in the evening, however, will find one of the “mild militant” on the job.

The White House officials are somewhat at a loss as to what shall be done, should the sentinels attempt to carry their campaign even further than the entrance to the grounds. They realize that they are facing a difficult proposition.

Wilson Sees Banners.

The President returned from a game of golf at 10:30 o’clock this morning and was driven, to the White House through the northwest gate of the Pennsylvania avenue side of the White House grounds. On either side of the gate stood throng of the silent sentinels.

So quickly was the move of the Presidential car off the Avenue into the grounds that the suffragists did not

(Continued on Third Page.)