

# Mother Jones

1830–1930



**WHY SHE MADE HISTORY** Mary Harris Jones, known as Mother Jones, was responsible for organizing workers in protest for better working conditions. Throughout her long life, she made bold statements in support of workers' rights.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Mother Jones's individuality brought attention to her cause.*

Described as militant and witty, Mary Harris Jones first began organizing laborers in the 1890s. She was known for staging unusual and attention-getting events. One of the best examples of her style was during a 1900 coal miner strike in Pennsylvania. She organized the coal miners' wives to march at night, banging on tin pans to block any workers who tried to come to work during the strike.

Mother Jones was especially talented at using the media to her advantage. One of her most important causes was the fight against child labor. Factories and mills often used children to make their products. These children usually worked long hours in harsh conditions for very little pay. Mother Jones fought tirelessly to bring an end to such practices.

In 1903 Mother Jones organized a weeklong march of child mill workers from Pennsylvania to the home of President Theodore Roosevelt in New York. The march was highly publicized, and many people saw for the first time the effect hard labor had on these children. Many of the children were very obviously suffering physically from the abusive conditions in which they were forced to work.



Library of Congress

## VOCABULARY

**incarceration** imprisonment

Mother Jones was nicknamed “the miner’s angel” for all of her efforts to win better conditions for coal miners. Her skill in speaking moved large groups of workers to join labor unions. The mine operators often had Mother Jones arrested, but her **incarcerations** attracted so much attention that the needs of her cause were still met.

Battles between mine owners and workers often turned violent, sometimes resulting in deaths on both sides. Mother Jones advocated non-violence, but was not afraid to face the rifles of mine guards.

Mother Jones lost her husband and children in a yellow fever epidemic in 1867. She compared what she did for the coal miners and child laborers to what any mother might do in defense of her own children.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Draw a Conclusion** Why do you think Mary Harris Jones earned the nickname of “Mother Jones?”

---

---

- 2. Making Inferences** Based upon what you know about Mother Jones, what causes might she support if she were alive today?

---

---

### ACTIVITY

- 3.** Mother Jones used creative and non-violent ways to draw attention to her cause. Think about a cause that you support. Think of creative ways you can make people aware of your cause. Share your ideas with the class.