

Why are People Marching?

Discussing Justice-Oriented Citizenship using Picture Books

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“Why are people marching?” Given today’s level of activism, this is a plausible question many students may have. Although only some students voice the questions, it is very likely that many more have pondered why people are protesting after seeing reports of events such as the Women’s March (equality for women), March for Our Lives (about gun control), Black Lives Matter (for racial justice), Janitors March (for fair pay), and Keep Families Together (demanding the Trump administration reunite immigrant families separated at the U.S.-Mexico border). As elementary teachers, our subsequent question becomes, “How can I respond?” This article outlines how integrating children’s literature, which presents accurate content regarding political activism, can lay the groundwork for discussing and answering students’ curiosity regarding why people are marching.



Bain News Service/Library of Congress (The image has color added not present in the original b/w photograph.)

Strikers from the Ladies Tailors union on picket line during the “Uprising of the 20,000” garment workers strike, New York City, 1910.

Social Studies and Activism

“The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.”¹ Most elementary teachers would define “good citizen” as someone who helps others,² and would emphasize civic engagement over political engagement.³ In general, teachers can consider three types of citizenship: personal responsibility, participatory, and justice oriented.⁴ Elementary teachers focus on personal responsibility when they teach about citizenship, mainly concentrating on volunteering and following rules.⁵ Many teachers are wary of instructing students in concepts of justice-oriented citizenship, concepts which critique social, political, and economic structures in order to address injustice. We hope to encourage such teachers to consider learning about justice-oriented citizenship, and then teach their students in an age-appropriate manner.

“In elementary schools, [students] need to participate in learning experiences that involve core values of democracy, including freedom of speech and thought, equality of opportunity, justice, and diversity.”⁶ With this in mind, it seems not only pertinent that educators discuss political activism, but it also seems necessary.

Similarly, two themes from the *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* closely align with the inclusion of such content: **6 POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE**, as well as **10 CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES**.⁷ At the elementary level, when studying Theme 6, students can be invited to explore their understanding of fairness and can learn to view problems through multiple perspectives. They can begin to understand fairness with simple problems such as sharing something equally among classmates, and can then build on the concept of fairness by contemplating how participants in marches and protests view unfairness, or injustice, in society. Equally important, the Standards encourage students studying **10 CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES** to ponder, “What is civic participation? How do citizens become involved? What is the role of citizens in the community and the nation, and as members of the world?” Mindful of this theme, teachers can illuminate the multiple forms of civic engagement throughout the year, one of which is citizens voicing opinions about unjust situations through peaceful protest.⁸

While most in-service and pre-service teachers understand citizenship in the sense of personal responsibility,⁹ there is a need for publications highlighting instructional strategies to teach activism as a right and responsibility of democratic citizenship. Practitioner articles exist where community service is taught within the frame of good citizenship.¹⁰ Similarly, examples of activism within the local school context exist where students identify school issues and take action, such as developing an anti-bullying campaign.¹¹ Some educators expanded the investigation to consider activism on the national scale by discussing the Occupy Wall Street Movement (about economic

justice) with fifth graders.¹² We build on this work of citizenship education by modeling strategies that expand elementary students’ conception of citizenship to include historical and current political activism—particularly through the civic actions of protests, strikes, and marches—with an integrated reading and social studies instructional approach.

Highlighting Picture Books

Given that they captivate students’ attention in ways that textbooks simply cannot,¹³ picture books are an inviting way to begin discussions about justice-oriented citizenship. It is the synergistic use of text and images that students find engaging. Therefore, teachers should encourage a critical analysis of both the text and images which can foster inquiry and critical thinking, and encourages students to view multiple perspectives. Critical analysis questions (**Sidebar 1, p. 6**) focusing on activism through a lens of justice-oriented citizenship can be used with these picture books.

An Upper Elementary Example

While many books regarding marches and protest are available, this section outlines how four selected picture books can be used in a five-day unit focusing on protests from the past century (1909, 1965), and others that have become annual events; some are ongoing even as we write. These books can be read aloud in grades 2–5, with the amount of scaffolding and depth of analysis gauged to the children’s level of understanding. Teachers may wish to rearrange the order in which the books are presented. If teachers are pressed for time, any of the books could be used for a stand-alone lesson. In describing classroom activities (below), we provide specific questions about each book, yet the critical analysis questions (listed in **Sidebar 1**) are also suitable for use with these books.

Day 1: Discuss Overarching Questions

We recommend teachers begin the unit with overarching questions that encourage students to consider the responsibilities and roles that citizens play within a society. The following questions are recommended to start these conversations:

What does it mean to be a citizen?

What are some of the activities that good citizens are involved in?

How can citizens create positive change in their communities?

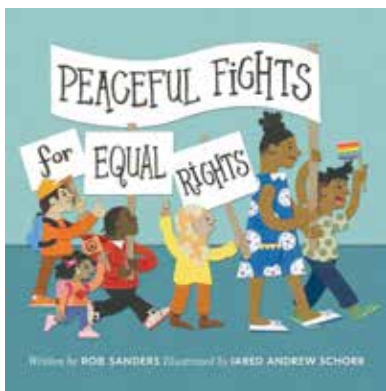
Can children be active citizens?

Student responses may be recorded as either a whole-group or individual task.

After pondering these overarching questions, students can make connections with citizenship and activism by analyzing recent and historical photos (**Sidebar 2, p. 7**) depicting activism at a local or national level, or both. For example, images are available from the Women’s March of 2017 in Washington,

DC, and from sister marches that were held in municipalities around the nation. As a means to foster a critical analysis of these images, we encourage teachers to ask the following questions:

- What do you see?*
- What do you think the people in the image are doing?*
- Why do you think they are doing that?*
- Why do you think the photograph was featured in the news?*

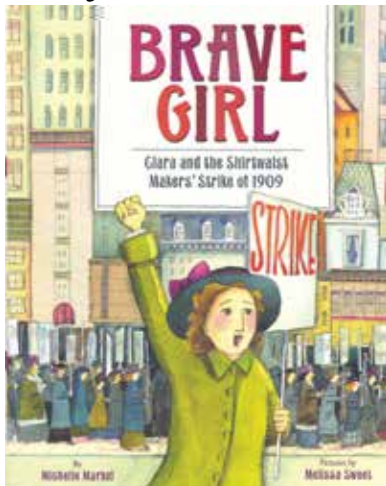


Next, to build vocabulary and explore new ideas about activism, teachers could read *Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights*. Due to its recent publication (2018), it is not yet known what, if any, awards this book may receive. Yet, it is noteworthy that this book,

with rich illustrations depicting diversity, was written by a practicing teacher. The visual images depicting various forms of activism enhance the activism vocabulary on each page. Many of these images have historical significance, thus providing multiple opportunities for teachers to dig deeper into the visual literacy presented in the book. For this reason, teachers may choose to read only a few pages, which can be explored at a deep level, or read the whole book and let students decide which pages deserve further consideration. Nevertheless, vast opportunities for building vocabulary are available through the glossary at the back of this book. After reading *Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights*, students should return to their earlier recorded answers to the overarching questions. Students can then revise their responses as well as create questions which they hope will be answered during their study of activism.

Day 2: Marching to End Child Labor

Building on the forms of activism discussed on the previous day,



a lesson on *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* invites discussion about child labor, immigrant children, and gender inequality. This Orbis Pictus Award Honor Book (NCTE), outlines how Clara Lemlich, an immigrant garment worker, inspired thousands of young women to go on strike thus ignit-

ing a positive change in working conditions. When Clara arrived in the United States in 1903, she was surprised that, although her parents could not find work, many factory jobs were available to young women. After working in dangerous conditions for unfair wages, Clara began challenging her employers by staging walkouts. Eventually, she helped to organize the 1909 Shirtwaist Makers' Strike.

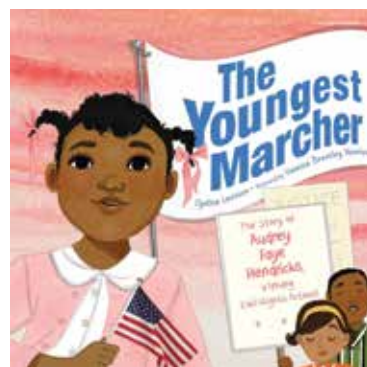
The author's note at the end of this book provides additional information which is useful for teachers and students alike. For example, it describes how bosses set clocks back near the end of the work day to dishonestly keep the workers on the job for longer hours, and how some factories hired girls as young as six years old to cut threads from garments.

Activism Vocabulary: Strike, Walkout, Union

Questions about the Text:

- Why do you think Clara could find work but her parents could not?*
- Some affluent women, who did not work in the factories, joined the march that Clara organized. Are there other ways people who did not work in the factory might have supported this cause?*
- How were children's "voices" heard in these marches?*

Day 3: Marching for Civil Rights



The Youngest Marcher was recognized as an NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade book, ALA Notable Book, and ILA Teachers Choice, and it received the Carter G. Woodson Book Award. Author Cynthia Levinson details an accurate and informed account of children's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Her three years of research included interviewing Audrey Faye Hendricks, whose childhood experiences in 1963 are the focus of this narrative. The author also shines a new light on the frequently told story of Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement by telling it from the perspective of a child—a nine-year-old girl who knew Dr. King as "Mike," and who heeded his call to "fill the jails...with children!" Levinson tells Audrey's courageous and memorable story through beautiful illustrations and a conversational tone that makes this content accessible to younger readers. When reading this book, teachers may specifically revisit the overarching question, "Can children be active citizens?" In addition, teachers may benefit from watching a 45-minute online video of the author's interactive presentation of this book at the Library of Congress to an audience of children.¹⁴

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Activism Vocabulary: Segregation, Justice, Picket, Marching, Rights, Protest

Questions about the Text:

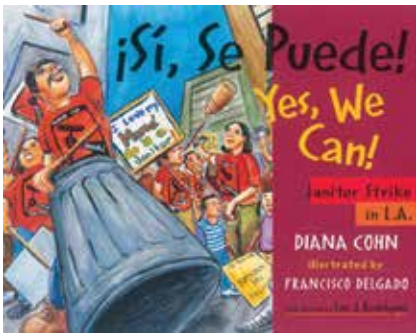
Why do you think Audrey's mother, when she asks Audrey to hush at the dinner table, thinks that children cannot share their ideas with "Mike"?

How do you think Audrey's parents, grandparents, and teacher felt about her willingness to go to jail?

Why do you think children were willing to fill the jails?

Pretend that you are Audrey. Describe the emotions you might feel eating Newberry's ice cream at the counter where you were once forbidden to sit.

Day 4: Janitors and Hotel Workers March



¡Sí, Se Puede! / Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A. brings cultural and linguistic diversity to the unit while also providing a historical narrative from a child's perspective. Additionally, this

book, by detailing marches that took place in Los Angeles, California, in the spring of 2000, presents the opportunity to discuss a march that adults may recall, as they may have been

involved in that protest (or in more recent Janitors Marches), or they may remember the news coverage of the day. The Best of Beyond Different award recognized this bilingual book as one of the top ten diversity books published in 2002, and it won the Jane Addams Children's Book Award.

¡Sí, Se Puede! tells the story of Carlitos and his mother, a leader in the Janitor's March of 2000. Carlitos initially does not know how to support his mother, but he finds a way to help. The last page of text describes how Mamá goes on to support hotel workers' rights to protest unjust low wages in that industry, thereby inviting students to ponder how we, as community members, can help one another.¹⁵

Activism Vocabulary: Vote, Fair, Strike, Union, Sí Se Puede, March, Rallies, Speech

Questions about the Text:

How do you think Carlitos and his classmates feel about their parents working so much?

Carlitos decides to help his mom by bringing signs to the march. What are other ways that Carlitos could have helped his mom?

Miss Lopez has a poster in her classroom that says, "Viva Cesar Chavez!" How was Chavez's activist work similar to Carlitos's and his mom's activism?

Day 5: Review and Reflect

On the final day of the unit, students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge acquired during the week by revisiting

Critical Analysis Questions about Activism

Question about the Text

What new information did you learn about marching as a form of social activism?

How do you think the protestors would describe the injustices they seek to change?

Who benefits from these injustices? Who is hurt by these injustices?

What fears might the protestors have?

What fears might their opponents have?

How are the protesters demonstrating citizenship?

How has this march influenced our society today?

Questions about the Images and Graphics

What new information can we observe by looking closely at an image?

How does this new information enhance the story?

What might we infer from studying the image?

What do you think the illustrator was trying to convey? Why?

If you could change one illustration in this book, which one would you change and why?

the overarching questions and photographs from the first day. While revisiting this content, students should be encouraged to add new responses, modify earlier responses, and/or remove some responses. In all instances (while adding, modifying or removing responses), students must justify and explain their decision. In addition, due to the many examples of activism depicted in the first book, *Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights*, teachers may choose to reread this book and ask students to document new ideas they recognize. We recommend the following questions to facilitate a culminating discussion about activism:

What can we learn from protests in the past?

How does learning about protests in the past affect how you think about protests today?

Why do people protest?

In what ways are protests effective? In what ways are they not effective?

Do good citizens protest? Explain your thoughts.

Lastly, teachers can return to the idea of what it means to be a “good citizen,” and ask students to create posters depicting their understanding of citizenship.

Extension Ideas

Teachers may use primary sources, aligned with each picture book, to extend the lessons on Days 2-4. **Figure 2** (p. 8) lists a variety of primary sources including: photographs, newspaper articles, testimonials, and interviews. Although teachers would

need to modify the text-based primary sources for elementary students, they could use analysis organizers such as those found on the Library of Congress or the National Archives websites. In order to focus on literacy skills, teachers could teach a mini lesson on close reading skills, and then have students use close reading strategies to dissect a short excerpt from a primary source. The inclusion of primary sources into this unit would allow for students to practice disciplinary literacy and provide more contextualization of the content within the picture books. Additionally, teachers may provide students with text sets of additional picture books that portray justice-oriented citizenship (**Sidebar 3**). Students could compare and contrast the activist strategies citizens used, in different times and places, to fight for equality

Conclusion

Citizenship is a common topic in elementary social studies, yet teachers often limit themselves to a narrow focus on aspects of citizenship that highlight personal responsibility. In recent years, there has been an increase in public displays of political activism in the United States, with citizens portraying justice-oriented citizenship through marches, strikes, and protests. As students consider these current movements, teachers have the opportunity to delve into the social studies themes of **POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE** and **CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES**. Picture books, paired with critical questions, provide an accessible way for elementary students to examine historical and current events. Through a study of justice-oriented citizenship using picture books, elementary students can make sense of why people are marching, recog-

Primary Sources to Pair with Picture Books

Shirtwaist Makers’ Strike, New York, 1909

Photographs:

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014684502/>

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3a42201/>

Testimonial (by Clara Lemlich):

http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/testimonials/ootts_ClaraLemlich.html

Children’s March, Birmingham, 1963

Photographs:

<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/amg/id/16328/rec/344>

Oral History Interviews:

Kids in Birmingham - <http://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/>

News Footage:

Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking to reporters after Children’s March, May 23, 1963.

http://crdl.usg.edu/cgi/crdl?format=_video;query=id:ugabma_wsbn_32757

Janitors’ Strike, Los Angeles, 2000

Photograph:

<http://socialjusticehistory.org/projects/justiceforjanitors/items/show/134>

Video Footage:

<http://socialjusticehistory.org/projects/justiceforjanitors/items/show/170>

New York Times article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/09/us/janitors-march-in-los-angeles-after-voting-to-begin-a-strike.html>

LA Times article:

<http://articles.latimes.com/2000/apr/08/local/me-17298>

Picture Books Illustrating Justice-Oriented Citizenship

Abouraya, K. L. *Hands Around the Library: Protecting Egypt's Treasured Books*. New York: Dial Books, 2012. Lexile 680L. Civilians form a human chain around a library to protect it during the Egyptian Revolution.

Brown, M. *Side by Side/Lado a Lado: The Story of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez/La Historia de Dolores Huerta y Cesar Chavez*. New York: HarperCollins Espanole, 2010. Lexile AD760L. How the couple first met, and later organized a nationwide grape boycott and a 340-mile march, demanding higher wages and better working conditions for farm workers in the 1960s.

Cohn, D. *¡Sí, se Puede! Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A.* El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2002. Through the eyes of a child, Cohn describes the 2000 janitor's strike for justice in Los Angeles.

Evans, S. W. *We March*. New York: Roaring Book Press, 2012. Lexile 290L. Although the text is brief, the images detail the 1963 March on Washington in a way that younger readers can understand.

Levinson, C. *The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2017. Lexile 720L. Describes Hendricks' experience as the youngest child participating in the 1963 Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama.

Markel, M. *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013. Lexile AD760L. Young Clara Lemlich worked to help organize the one of the largest strikes of women garment workers in New York, fighting for safer working conditions.

Murphy, C. R. *Marching with Aunt Susan: Susan B. Anthony and the Fight for Women's Suffrage*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree, 2011. Lexile AD650L. Based on a real diary entry, this book tells of ten-year-old Bessie Keith Pond meeting with Susan B. Anthony as she fought for women's suffrage in California, 1896.

Pinkney, A. D. *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2010. Lexile AD600L. Four college students dared to sit at the Woolworth lunch counter labeled for "whites only," sparking other sit-ins across the United States.

Shelton, P. Y. *Child of the Civil Rights Movement*. Toronto, ON: Schwartz & Wade, 2009. Lexile AD840L. The author describes

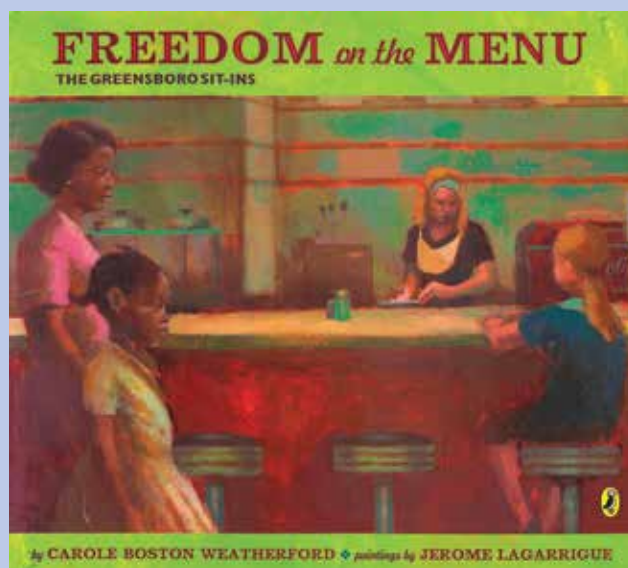
her own upbringing as a daughter of civil rights activist Andrew Young, her frequent encounters with "Uncle Martin" (MLK), and how she participated in the march from Selma to Montgomery.

Stone, T. L. *Elizabeth Leads the Way: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Right to Vote*. New York: Henry Holt, 2008. Lexile AD700L. Tells the story of Stanton's life from childhood to her leadership in the suffrage movement.

Tafolla, C. *That's Not Fair/¡No es Justo!: Emma Tenayuca's Struggle for Justice/La Lucha de Emma Tenayuca por la Justiciar*. San Antonio, TX: Wings Press, 2008. Lexile AD650L. At the age of 21, Emma Tenayuca led thousands of Mexican-American pecan workers in a successful strike in 1938.

Tonatiuh, D. *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight*. New York, NY: Henry N. Abrams, 2018. Undocumented workers migrate, then work in poor working conditions, often with low wages. The author highlights one character, Juan, who organizes to fight for his rights as a worker, despite the risks.

Weatherford, C. B. *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins*. London, United Kingdom: Puffin Books, 2007. Lexile AD660L. A (fictional) eight-year-old girl sees young men taking a stand for equal rights in 1960s, then makes signs for marches fighting for the equality she longs for.



nize activism as a key aspect of citizenship, and begin to see themselves as agents of change. ●

Notes

1. This NCSS definition of “social studies,” adopted in 1992, was quoted in NCSS, *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2010), p. 3, www.socialstudies.org/standards/execsummary.
2. S. W. Fry and J. O’Brien, “Cultivating a Justice Orientation toward Citizenship in Preservice Elementary Teachers,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 43, no. 3 (2015), 405–434.
3. L. A. Martin, “Elementary and Secondary Teacher Education Students’ Perspectives on Citizenship,” *Action in Teacher Education* 3, no. 3 (2008), 54–63.
4. J. Westheimer and J. Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,” *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004), 237–269.
5. Fry and O’Brien.
6. NCSS, “Powerful and Purposeful Teaching and Learning in Elementary School Social Studies,” *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 22, no. 1 (September/October 2009), 32.
7. NCSS, 2010.
8. The term “citizenship” in this article relates to the attitudes and activities of all community members, and does not imply citizenship to a particular country, but instead to a global citizenship that knows no boundaries. Acknowledging that citizenship can be a sensitive term for many students, teachers are encouraged to discuss this definition with students to ensure all students feel welcomed and believe citizenship is attainable for them.
9. Fry and O’Brien, 2015; Martin, 2008; C. S. Sunal, L. A. Kelley, and D. W. Sunal, “Citizenship Education in the Elementary Classroom: Teacher Candidates Photograph and Describe their Perceptions,” *Journal of Social Studies Research* 33, no. 1 (2009), 33–70.
10. M. Boyle-Baise, D. Bernens-Kinhead, W. Coake, L. Loudermilk, D. Lukasik, and W. Podany, “Citizenship as a Verb: Teaching Students to Become Informed, Think It Through, and Take Action,” *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 24, no. 1

(September/October 2011), 5–9; J. D. Ohn and R. Wade, “Community Service-Learning as a Group Inquiry Project,” *The Social Studies* 100, no. 5 (2009), 200–211.

11. E. Vaughn and K. Obenchain, “Fourth Graders Confront an Injustice: The Anti-Bullying Campaign: A Social Action Inquiry Project,” *The Social Studies*, 106, no. 1 (2015), 13–23.
12. E. Bellows, M. Bauml, S. Fields, and M. Ledbetter, “Occupy Wall Street: Examining a Current Event as It Happens,” *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 24, no. 4 (March/April 2012), 18–22.
13. R. T. Vacca, J. A. L. Vacca, and M. E. Mraz, *Content Area Reading: Literacy and Learning across the Curriculum* (New York: Pearson, 2014).
14. “Cynthia Levinson & The Youngest Marcher,” video, 45 min. (Library of Congress, February 3, 2017), https://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=8142.
15. Teachers should be aware that one of the grievances in the more recent Janitors’ March of 2018 was lack of safety on the job. The topic comes up in Google searches. Women marchers were demanding better policies and procedures to protect them from sexual assault during night shifts. Nuala Sawyer, “More Than 100 Janitors, Rape Survivors, March from S.F. to Sacramento,” *SF Weekly* (September 10, 2018), <http://www.sfweekly.com/news/more-than-100-janitors-rape-survivors-march-from-s-f-to-sacramento/>.

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