



# HISTORICAL SOCIETY *of the* NEW YORK COURTS

## THE LEGAL LEGACY OF THE TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FACTORY FIRE

### Essay Prompts

1. In 2010, news reports suggested that risky techniques and inadequate safety precautions contributed to the explosion and fire of an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. Look at the legislation enacted in the wake of the Triangle Factory fire to ensure safer workplaces. Are these laws strong enough to allow the courts to redress the harm suffered by Gulf Coast workers and residents? Will additional legislative and executive action be necessary to deal with this new type of industrial danger?
2. Select a person who played an important role in the State and federal reforms following the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and discuss that person's influence on the labor movement.
3. Not all wrongs are crimes, and this is clearly demonstrated in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire cases. Discuss the problems the courts faced in bringing Harris and Blanck, the factory owners, to justice.
4. At the time of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, women did not have the right to vote or run for public office. Nonetheless, they played a pivotal part in enacting the reform legislation. Discuss this important aspect of the Women's Rights Movement.
5. Judicial activism and judicial restraint are terms applied to judges who seek to expand or curtail common law legal principles. In *People v. Harris*, we find examples of both activism (Judge O'Sullivan's decision disallowing challenges to the Grand Jury indictments) and restraint (Judge Crain's instructions to the jury preserving the traditional common law employer's defenses). Discuss the tensions produced by the need to expand the common law to cover new situations while at the same time retaining stability in the law.