

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Lucy Parsons, Labor Organizer, 1853?-1942

Lucy Parsons rose to international fame as a labor organizer, yet her beginnings are shrouded in mystery. She was born in Waco about 1853, quite likely a slave. In 1871 she married or allied with Albert Parsons, a white Confederate Civil War veteran turned Reconstruction journalist. Interracial marriage was illegal. When contemporary newspapers called her a “Negress,” Lucy insisted that her dark complexion resulted from Hispanic and Native American ancestry.<sup>1</sup>

Facing discrimination and threats in Texas, the couple moved to Chicago. Both embraced anarchism, wrote for radical publications, and rallied workers. They operated a dressmaking business to support their two young children. In May 1886 Albert Parsons was charged with complicity for a bombing in Haymarket Plaza, although he and Lucy had left the rally scene before the incident occurred.<sup>2</sup>

Lucy traveled and campaigned extensively to save her husband but was unable to prevent his execution by hanging. Undaunted, she continued to write, speak, and organize against inequities. Chicago police described her as “more dangerous than a thousand rioters.”<sup>3</sup> Lucy Parsons was a founding member of Industrial Workers of the World, led hunger demonstrations, championed family and women’s rights, and defended nine African Americans in Scottsboro who were falsely accused of rape. When she died in a house fire, her library and personal papers were confiscated.<sup>4</sup>



### Quotations

*There is no power on earth that can stop men and women who are determined to be free at all hazards. There is no power on earth so great as the power of the intellect.*<sup>5</sup>

*Shoulder to shoulder with one accord, you should arise and take what is yours.*<sup>6</sup>

*When woman is admitted into the Council of Nations, war will come to an end, for woman more than man knows the value of life.*<sup>7</sup>

### Photo

Chicago Historical Society; image from Texas Woman’s University, Denton.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Ashbaugh, “Parsons, Lucy Eldine,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/fpa68.html> (March 30, 2005); “Lucy Parsons: Woman of Will,” Industrial Workers of the World, <http://www.iww.org/en/culture/biography/LucyParsons1.shtml> (July 11, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Leigh Bienen, “1886: Haymarket Affair,” Northwestern University School of Law, <http://homicide.northwestern.edu/crimes/haymarket1/> (April 25, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Ashbaugh, “Parsons, Lucy Eldine,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/fpa68.html> (March 30, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> “Lucy Parsons: Woman of Will,” Industrial Workers of the World, <http://www.iww.org/en/culture/biography/LucyParsons1.shtml> (July 11, 2005); Libero Della Piana, “Lucy Parsons: The Life of a Revolutionary,” *Dynamic Magazine*, February 2001, online <http://www.yclusa.org/article/view/1484/1/284> (July 5, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Parsons, address to founding convention of Industrial Workers of the World, Chicago, 1905, reprinted William Loren Katz, “Lucy Gonzales Parsons,” *The Black World Today*, June 29, 2005, online <http://tbwt.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=504&Itemid=41> (July 5, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Parsons, quoted in Caili Thibeault, “Lucy Parsons: A Life Dedicated to Justice,” *Illinois History*, April 1998, online through Illinois Periodicals Online Project, Northern Illinois University Libraries, <http://www.lib.niu.edu/ipo/ihy980450.html> (July 5, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Lucy Parsons, quoted in Ruthe Winegarten, *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p. 79, referencing Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Kerr, 1976), pp. 217-19.