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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ANTI-UNIONISM AND THE CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY  
PAUL STROMBERG  
CHICAGO, IL  
AUGUST 2021

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is one of the most influential political organizations in Illinois. Like other political organizations, the CTU influences policy through activism, advocacy, and endorsements. Unlike most political organizations, however, the CTU's 20,000 members are responsible for carrying out policy decisions through their roles as teachers, paraprofessionals, and clinicians in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). In response to this influence, anti-unionists have become increasingly adept at criticizing the CTU, using anti-union rhetoric to malign unionized teachers. Simultaneously, anti-unionists have utilized anti-union litigation to disable teacher unions, stripping them of guaranteed protections. Assisted by conflict theory, this study examines rhetoric in support of and critical of the CTU through a discourse analysis of ten Twitter accounts central to Chicago's teacher union debate. Ultimately the author uses these accounts to explain how the CTU has maintained its political influence despite persistent anti-union rhetoric and litigation.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Problem Statement**

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is one of the most visible and politically influential Unions in Chicago, if not the country. The 20,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, and clinicians who make up the union's membership represent not only a substantial political block but also an extremely active one (Chicago Teachers Union, 2019). The teachers union has a robust social media following with 5,795 followers on its Twitter account alone. CTU Vice-President Stacy Davis Gates has 6,634 followers, CTU President Jesse Sharkey, 5,996 followers, and former president Karen Lewis, over thirteen thousand followers. By contrast, the Twitter account of Chicago's Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) only has 3,412 followers, and their president John Catanzara only has 25 followers. This is a stark contrast considering both the CTU and FOP have a strong presence in Chicago. However, the CTU's social media footprint is a tiny reflection of the organization's political influence.

The CTU holds meaningful political influence over local and national politics, evidenced by recent news. 2020 Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren both made public displays of solidarity with striking teachers when they met with union leadership to discuss solutions to their 2019 standoff (NBC Chicago, 2019). Presidential election campaigns present enormous scheduling challenges, yet both candidates chose to set aside time

to visit the CTU. Sanders and Warren were not only showing solidarity with their visit; they were hoping for endorsements from the CTU. Far from extraordinary, political plays like this are commonplace in local Chicago politics. Mayoral candidates Toni Preckwinkle and Jesus Garcia earned CTU endorsements in 2014 and 2018, respectively, after meeting with the union (Perez & Ruthhart, 2014; Pratt, 2018). City council candidates are also routinely endorsed by the CTU, following similar meetings (Chicago Teachers Union Endorsement Archives, 2020).

While many other teacher unions limit themselves to traditional strikes and contract negotiations (Koppich, 2012), the CTU engages actively and often with the community it serves (Brogan, 2014). During summer 2020 alone, the CTU organized marches and car caravans outside of the Board of Education during every one of its scheduled meetings (Chicago Teachers Union, 2020). Hundreds of community members attended these protests, signaling the political influence of the union. Many of these demonstrations focused on either the Black Lives Matter movement or the Covid-19 pandemic. The central demand of these latter series of protests was that CPS reverse its decision to reopen schools in the fall, a request that the district eventually met (Leone, Sherry, Keilman & Hao, 2020).

Since 2018, the CTU has actively engaged in police reform, health advocacy, and mayoral, gubernatorial, and presidential politics with varying levels of success (Leone, Sherry, Keilman & Hao, 2020; NBC Chicago, 2019). Even in defeat, the CTU tends to demonstrate its political impact. For example, although the Board of Education voted down the union's push to remove police from CPS, the policy was only lost by two votes (Leone, 2020). In a landscape where anti-unionism seems stronger than ever, this apparent loss can be read as a political

victory. The CTU's focus on social justice has enabled them to engage with their community and foster public support during a time when the union's future is less secure than ever.

The CTU's persistent political influence has met with increasing anti-union activity at local and national levels. Anti-unionists typically work through either anti-union litigation or anti-union rhetoric (Eisenberg-Guyot & Hagopian, 2018; Jha, Banerjee & Moller, 2020; Pierson, 2018; Teresa & Good, 2018; Weiner, 2013). Although the CTU may not necessarily be the specific intended target of these anti-union tactics, it certainly has to deal with them. In the last ten years alone, both of these tactics have demonstrated devastating potential.

Anti-union litigation threatens teacher unions by stripping away their abilities to organize and raise money. In 2018, As a result of anti-union litigation, the Supreme Court found that mandatory collection of teacher union dues was unconstitutional (Pierson, 2018; Eisenberg-Guyot & Hagopian, 2018). Anti-union rhetoric threatens teacher unions by framing them as undeserving and greedy (Kane & Newman, 2019), thereby legitimizing the onslaught of anti-union litigation such as this. Each of these things should impact the CTU, and yet the organization remains reasonably influential.

The influence and popularity of the CTU in the face of persistent attacks make it a fascinating case study of how unions can and do thrive amid anti-unionism. This popularity is measured by a 2018 Gallup poll, which showed public support of unions at a decade-long high (Saad, 2020) and pro-union movements, such as the charter school unionization (Montaño, 2015; Young, 2011).

Despite anti-union tactics used to discredit and disempower teacher unions, the CTU remains politically influential. Although this influence is evident, we still don't understand why it exists or how it is generated. Understanding this may help other unions across the country combat growing anti-union reforms.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Opposition to the CTU is arguably more robust now than it has ever been, yet the union remains politically influential. Recent political victories may indicate that the union's influence is growing, not shrinking, in the face of political opposition. The gains made by the union following their 2019 strike, as well as their continued popular support, at least point to that possibility. The purpose of this study is to understand this apparent contradiction.

Through this study, Mr. Stromberg describes the rhetorical and organizational strategies used by the CTU to defend against and respond to anti-unionism. Understanding how the CTU has remained politically influential despite growing political opposition serves two essential purposes. First, there is academic merit in understanding a counter-intuitive phenomenon. No currently available literature exists which can explain the contradiction described above. Mr. Stromberg's study, therefore, contributes valuable knowledge about contemporary unionism. Second, understanding how the CTU has remained politically influential helped him describe successful rhetorical strategies that other teacher unions might use. This replicable strategy contributes strategic political knowledge to the literature and expands what future unions may believe is possible.

## **Thesis Overview**

To understand the CTU's influence despite anti-union tactics, Mr. Stromberg reviews a wide swath of literature on teacher unions. He pays particular attention to traditional forms of union political action, contemporary teacher activism, and union leadership demographics. Similarly, Mr. Stromberg uses his literature review to investigate the anti-union movement. He is most interested in the movement's central claims and the impact of its judicial and rhetorical challenges to teacher unions.

Once Mr. Stromberg has a robust understanding of the literature, he transitions to a conceptual framework. Mr. Stromberg uses conflict theory to help contextualize the conflict between the CTU and anti-unionists. Conflict theory helps him understand the behavior and rhetoric used by unionists and anti-unionists alike. In this way, conflict theory is fundamental to the development of his thesis.

The third chapter of this thesis focuses on Mr. Stromberg's research methodology. The specifics of his data collection and analysis plan are discussed in detail in this chapter. He utilized discourse analysis procedures to analyze how the CTU responds to and defends against anti-unionism. The study of this rhetoric is informed by how teacher unions traditionally function and how anti-unionists traditionally try to weaken unions.

In chapter four, Mr. Stromberg reviews the findings for his study. Here the data is broken into three categories based on themes present in the data. These categories were developed using the discourse analysis procedures discussed in chapter three. Following a detailed description of

these categories, Mr. Stromberg concludes chapter four with a discussion of the validity of the findings, which include a brief statement about his analytical bias.

The fifth and final chapter of Mr. Stromberg's study discusses his interpretations of the findings. He then discusses the limitations of those interpretations, including notes about his study's scope and bias. In light of those limitations, Mr. Stromberg then makes recommendations for future research in order to test his interpretations against broader conditions. The thesis ends with brief statements about the implications of the conclusions Mr. Stromberg drew from his study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

To understand the uniqueness of the CTU, it is first essential to understand union politics more generally. In doing this, the following literature review explores traditional forms of union political action, contemporary teacher activism, the demographics of union leadership, and finally, tactics used by anti-unionists to disempower unions. Each of these sections contextualizes the CTU's relatively diverse political interests and successful political influence.

The first section on union political action describes the traditional political scope of unions. This limited scope contextualizes the uniqueness of the CTU's relatively extensive policy interests, including healthcare, housing, and policing, among other things. The second section describes how teacher activism has changed in recent years and how that change has informed both the organizational structure and influence of contemporary teacher unions. The third section describes the demographics of teacher union leadership. Here, the rise of social justice teacher activism is explained as a response to the exclusion of women and people of color from union leadership. The final section of the literature review describes the anti-union tactics used to limit teacher union power and political influence. Here the CTU's persistent political influence is juxtaposed with anti-unionists' tenacious efforts, leaving a need for further study to understand the contradiction.

## **Union Political Action**

The first step in unraveling the CTU's political influence is understanding typical forms of union political action. Doing this will reveal if and how the CTU acts differently than other unions to maintain its political influence. It turns out that, although different in some ways, the scope of union politics is often fundamentally similar. With the possible exception of local political endorsements, such as the CTU's 2019 endorsement of mayoral candidate Toni Preckwinkle, most unions have a somewhat limited scope. Unions concern themselves a great deal with working conditions and compensation within the workplaces they represent. In most cases, teacher union leadership remains silent on political issues that do not directly impact their workplaces (Kane & Newman, 2019; Koppich, 2012). A survey of union contracts from fifty of America's largest school districts indicated that unions almost exclusively bargain over class size, compensation, and overall required work hours (Hess & Loup, 2008).

Teacher unions typically concern themselves with school conditions and their compensation (Eberts, 2007; Gius, 2013; Merkle & Phillips, 2018; Roch & Sai, 2017; Urban, 1982). Like other unionized workers, teachers may take a stance on external political issues but typically only to the degree that those issues impact their workplaces (Brown & Stern, 2018). For example, teacher unions may endorse candidates who support public schools' increased funding because doing so may directly impact union members' workplaces.

In addition to the limited political scope of typical unions, the degree to which most unions interact with their hometowns is also quite limited (Kane & Newman, 2019; Koppich, 2012). Outside of occasional strikes, most communities may only be faintly aware of a union's

existence. Unions typically don't have a large following or an obvious presence in their communities. This principle transcends teacher unions and can generally apply to most types of unions (Kane & Newman, 2019). Because the scope of unions is generally limited to the issues described previously, so too is their influence. (Eberts, 2007; Gius, 2013; Kane & Newman, 2019; Koppich, 2012; Merkle & Phillips, 2018; Roch & Sai, 2017; Urban, 1982).

### **Contemporary Teacher Activism**

Although important, traditional forms of union political action are not the only things contributing to educational politics. Contemporary teacher activism utilizes new organizational structures, social media, and social justice to influence politics (Brickner, 2016; Ho, 2015; Picower, 2012; Matias & Liou, 2014; Valenzuela, 2013; White, 2020). Understanding the CTU's persistent political influence is, therefore, contingent upon understanding contemporary teacher activism.

Unions are typically organized using a top-down leadership model (White, 2020). According to this model, a union's agenda is shaped by leaders who then pass on strategies for achieving that agenda to their members. However, contemporary teacher unions are increasingly organized using a bottom-up leadership model. According to this model, union leaders take cues from their rank and file members about union agendas and strategies. In this model, the leaders' role is to negotiate with district administrators to achieve the goals set by their rank and file members (Weiner, 2013; White, 2020).

Originating in British public schools of the 1960s, the rank and file movement was first developed by the International Socialist Party to halt cooperation with ruling classes. In reaching

this goal, rank and file leadership was drawn from ordinary teachers rather than career bureaucrats (Seifert, 1984). Although the movement's language has evolved over the last fifty years, rank and file teacher union goals have remained fundamentally the same. Today, members of rank and file teacher caucuses advocate for education as experts of the job. They speak from personal experience about the declining conditions within schools and utilize the networks they developed while teaching (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Brenner, 2013). For example, rank and file teachers in Los Angeles were able to successfully halt a restructuring of their school system, which would have closed many schools, by using the family and parent connections they built during their time as teachers. All this has become possible as a result of bottom-up leadership models (White, 2020).

As a result of new bottom-up leadership models, teacher activists now, more than ever, have real power within their unions. Rank and file teacher activists, many of whom are interested in social justice (White, 2020), can now set union goals. This phenomenon has given rise to what some call social justice, or social movement, unionism. Social justice unionism is defined by union politics, which intersects with social justice activism. This is accomplished through the development of partnerships between teacher unions and the communities they serve.

As an example of these new partnerships, The New York City Teachers Union has formed relationships with a wide variety of non-profit organizations to better serve their low-income students (Weiner, 2013). This relationship represents a departure from the racially tense relationship that the same union had with its communities only a few decades ago (Buffett, 2019; Podair, 2002; Pawlewicz, 2020). For example, the New York Teachers Guild, a short-lived

but highly publicized offshoot of the New York City Teachers Union, famously defended one of their members against the 1936 allegation of aggravated assault against a fourteen-year-old black boy. This defense led to widespread protests and accusations of racial bias (Toloudis, 2015).

The development of social justice unionism may explain why policies that impact schools' racial segregation are increasingly at the forefront of union politics across the country (Brogan, 2014; Todd-Breland, 2018; White, 2020). Former CTU President Karen Lewis, a member of Chicago's caucus of rank and file educators, emphasized this focus in 2013 when she stated, "If the status quo [racial segregation] is maintained, or children and our members will never be winners..." (Todd-Breland, p.227). Lewis's statement underscores a fundamental change in the way unions operate. By tying union members' success to a social justice agenda, contemporary teacher activists begin to integrate various policies into teacher union politics.

It can no longer be assumed that unions will only negotiate over working conditions and compensation. Unions, which utilize a social justice perspective, are now interested in policies that impact unequal access to housing, healthcare, and education (Picower, 2012; Matias & Liou, 2014; Todd-Breland, 2018). In other words, social justice teacher unions are increasingly interested in resources that, in many cities, are disproportionately distributed to wealthy white neighborhoods (Kershaw, 2015; Smith, 2007). The agenda created by teacher activists in a bottom-up leadership model has led unions to engage in a wider variety of issues, thereby potentially increasing their political influence (White, 2020).

Although unions may typically be cautious about their political scope, teacher activists are often less so. Today individual teachers engage in political action with greater frequency than

their historical counterparts (Brickner, 2016; Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Valenzuela, 2013). This is due, in part, to the invention of social media. Individual teachers' ability to engage politically without their unions' consent has increased dramatically, along with the rise of social media. Social media allows activists to act alone and with ease as opposed to traditional activism, which requires much more organization. This political freedom has led teacher activists to act in new and bold ways (Brickner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). For example, #evaluatethis became a nationally trending movement when teacher activists used Twitter to combat the high-stakes tests, which limited their job security. Along with the hashtag, teachers posted comments about the emotional, developmental, and intellectual growth they foster, which is not evaluated by high stakes tests but is, nonetheless, an essential part of education (Brickner, 2016).

Although unions may have been slow to pick up the trend, there is some indication that social media activism has led both to greater solidarity with teacher unions and greater political participation with pro-union causes (Brickner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). This is explained, in part, by the way social media allows for the free exchange of information. The norm of journalistic neutrality prevents most news organizations from sharing information that would mobilize pro-union movements. However, anyone can share information on social media for any reason (Hoffman, 2006). This may be a contributing factor in the persistent popularity of teacher unions (Saad, 2020). Using social media, teacher activists in Minneapolis-St Paul, for example, have skirted journalistic neutrality norms by sharing information selectively that may mobilize their supporters (Brickner, 2016; Yamamoto, 2006). As a result, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers in 2013 amassed enough public support to secure collective bargaining rights (Brickner,

2016). Although an essential factor in their political influence, contemporary teacher activists have embraced more than just twenty-first-century tools.

As previously stated, contemporary teacher activists, called social justice teacher activists by some scholars (Picower, 2012; Weiner, 2013; Sosa-Provencio, 2019), have become increasingly interested in social justice. Literature demonstrates the growing concerns among these teachers that, far from uplifting oppressed populations, education simply reproduces existing racial and economic inequality embedded in our society (Ho, 2015; Quan, Brancho, Wilkerson & Clark, 2019; Straubhaar, 2014). Racial and economic inequality was, for many years, believed to be antithetical to a quality education. Quality education was supposed to act as a catalyst to social mobility regardless of race or economic status (Urban, 1982; Goldstein, 2014).

Today social justice teacher activists do not take this idea for granted. Many of the norms previously believed to support students, such as rigorous testing, and tracked classes, have become targets for reform. Social justice teacher activists are working to dismantle these norms and others that they think may be leading to racial and economic inequality (Picower, 2012; Matias & Liou, 2014). For example, Chicago's educators have renewed their efforts to engage actively with their communities by partnering with local social justice organizations such as The Pilsen Alliance and Blocks Together. With these Black and Latinx community organizations' counsel, Chicago's rank and file educators have added several services to their agenda, including increased mental health and housing support (Todd-Breland, 2018).

This indicates the CTU's commitment to social justice and demonstrates its broad political scope, contributing to its political influence. Social justice teacher activism requires educators to do the difficult work of imagining not only what their colleagues may be doing to reproduce unjust systems but how they are contributing to these systems as well. This work has led to, for example, the revitalization of "white savior" criticism, which critiques the way white teachers implicitly support racial hierarchy (Quan, Bracho, Wilkerson & Clark, 2019; Straubhaar, 2014). In this way, social justice teacher activism is more active and more self-reflective than it used to be (Ho, 2015).

The same critical lens used to identify white saviorism has led to a slow but revolutionary shift. For one of the first times in educational history, white teachers are making room for leadership from Black and brown intellectuals by including them in critical conversations about racial justice (Todd-Breland, 2018; Quan, Bracho, Wilkerson & Clark, 2019; White, 2020). During few times in the tradition of even progressive politics, has this been true (Goldstein, 2014; Todd-Breland, 2018; Urban, 1982).

Teacher unions have, at times, been actively antagonistic to anti-racist initiatives when those initiatives required inconveniencing their white members. This was the case, for example, in 1968 when the New York City Teachers Union went on strike to prevent Black teachers from replacing white teachers in a predominantly Black school (Buffett, 2019; Podair, 2002). Although not fully realized, the contemporary decentering of white teachers and a more general commitment to social justice have been adopted by educators in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and Washington D.C. (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Quan,

Brancho, Wilkerson & Clark, 2019). This renewed commitment to social justice may be a factor in the organizations' persistent political influence. A social justice agenda, after all, encourages engagement with a wide variety of policies outside of traditional teacher union politics (Ho, 2015; Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Weiner, 2013).

### **Demographics of Union Leadership**

Another critical factor in the development of contemporary teacher unionism lies in the demographic composition of union leadership. Despite changes to teacher activism, many unions remain demographically unchanged. Although teaching is a fundamentally feminized profession (Healy & Kirton, 2013; James, 2010; Oram, 2007; Trent, 2014), where women account for as many as seventy-six percent of the workforce (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), teacher unions have historically been led by white men (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2004; Goldstien, 2014; Mellor & Kath, 2016; Oram, 2007; Zullo, 2012). This trend holds all over the country but is best exemplified by the contrast between the CTU's historical leadership and its members' demographic composition.

Since the inception of the CTU, most of its members have been women, and a significant portion of these women have been Black. More than half of all college-educated Black women who moved to Chicago during the great migration (1916-1970) became teachers (Lyons, 2008). Despite this trend, the first person of color and the first woman to serve as president of the CTU, Jacqueline Vaughn, was not elected until 1984, almost fifty years after the union's formation. In fact, All but two of the CTU's presidents have been white men (Lyons, 2008; Todd-Breland, 2018).

The demographic composition of typical union leadership is important to consider, as it helps contextualize teacher activism's evolution and, therefore, the persistent political influence of the CTU. Growing teacher activism can be understood as a response to union leadership's demographic stagnation (Ashby & Bruno, 2016), which will be more fully explored in this section. Additionally, deviation from leadership norms often attracts antagonistic behavior both inside and outside of unions (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Healy & Kirton, 2013; Oram, 2007; Sweetman, 2018; Zullo, 2012). This was undoubtedly true for Karen Lewis, who in 2010 became only the second Black woman to serve as president of the CTU, and one of the union's most heavily criticized leaders (Ashby & Bruno, 2016). Lewis's case demonstrates how gender and race intersect in ways that prevent many of its members from accessing leadership positions. For this reason, understanding typical union demographics is vital to understanding both the CTU's resistance to criticism and evolving teacher activism.

Some literature seeks to explain the persistence of male dominance in union leadership through sex antagonism. Sex antagonism placates women's desire for leadership without supporting union policy, which would benefit women (Healy & Kirton, 2013; Oram, 2007). Unions often assemble women's committees, which offer women some responsibility without real decision-making power. These committees may be tasked with fundraising and event planning rather than meaningful policy advocacy. Due to their lack of political control, many women also lack resources, such as childcare, which would help them thrive in their professions (Healy & Kirton, 2013).

The existence of sex antagonism may also be attributed to how union leadership requires women to act contrary to gender norms (Endendijk et al., 2017; Healy & Kirton, 2013; Oram, 2007). Contract negotiation and policy advocacy, after all, do not align with a woman's typical gender roles; however, teaching does (Endendijk et al., 2017). This may explain why the overwhelming majority of teachers are women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), while most union leaders are men (Goldstien, 2014; Mellor & Kath, 2016; Oram, 2007). The norms which push women towards teaching may also be repelling them from leadership positions. Although important, the gender segregation of education has consequences beyond union leadership.

The same gender norms block women from union leadership and push them to take on disproportionately burdensome caretaking responsibilities. An "ethic of care," which centers caretaking above all else, is a driving philosophy of many women teachers (James, 2010; Sosa-Provincia, 2019). This ethic of care has led elementary school teachers to prioritize their students' needs far above their own, often leading to limited free time (James, 2010). Pursuant to these gendered norms, women in union leadership positions often describe caretaking as a central motivation for seeking out leadership in the first place. Women in positions of power often advocate for more leisure time to spend with their families and money to spend on their families (Healy & Kirton, 2013). In other words, even women who take on leadership roles often do so within the boundaries of their gender norms.

Many women teachers describe a glass ceiling, which, although invisible, prevents them from accessing administrative jobs. On top of being ostracized by their peers, women who seek

out leadership positions often find that the jobs are not amenable to working mothers. Jobs in educational leadership rarely make time for childcare or family emergencies. The process is altogether so discouraging that many women, learning of the obstacles, choose not to apply for leadership roles in the first place (Moreau, 2007). The case for gender discrimination becomes even more compelling when considering the historical antecedents of contemporary education.

Gender has always been an important factor in education. The profession was only feminized in the first place because women were excluded from higher-paying jobs in, for example, medicine and law (Goldstein, 2014; Urban, 1982). Although women's career options are more expansive than they were one hundred years ago, the limited possibilities of women's leadership have persisted in unions for over a century (Oram, 2007). This persistence may explain teacher activism's evolution outside of traditional union politics. Prevented from accessing power through conventional means, teacher activists have increasingly taken to social media to air their grievances (Brickner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). Organizations that embrace social media and bottom-up leadership models (White, 2020) may be uniquely positioned to maintain political influence during turbulent times for unions. Further study is needed, however, to support this possibility.

Similar to the impact of gender norms, racism helps explain why people of color have been disproportionately excluded from leadership positions within unions (Sweetman, 2018; Zullo, 2012). People of color report higher rates of "bullying" and harassment in unions than white men (Birdell Bauer & Cranford, 2017; Sweetman, 2018), indicating a hostile work environment contributing to racialized exclusion from union leadership. For example, Latinx

employees report disproportionately frequent threats of firing, deportation, and physical abuse (Birdell Bauer & Cranford, 2017). Unlike sex antagonism, however, bullying union members of color cannot be explained by a deviation from gender norms. Instead, academics tend to use the lens of white supremacy to explain the persistence of disproportionate white dominance in various fields (Leonardo, 2004). Through this lens, the exclusion of people of color from union leadership can be explained, at least in part, by white supremacy, which creates a hostile environment for people of color seeking employment, promotion, or leadership positions (Birdell Bauer & Cranford, 2017).

Discrimination against people of color within unions may help explain the growth of social media and social justice teacher activism. Like women, people of color who have been excluded from leadership positions may be utilizing social media to share their political perspectives (Brickner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). Similarly, the increasing emphasis on social justice among teacher activists may be explained by growing impatience with racial exclusion. As people of color are excluded from union leadership, they may be turning to a wider variety of policies, with which they may have an impact (Matias & Liou, 2014; Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Weiner, 2013).

In this way, growing social justice and social media teacher activism can be understood as a response to the historical exclusion of people of color from union leadership. Some of the unions which have adopted a social justice model have also been quite racially exclusive in the past. (Todd-Breland, 2018; White, 2020). Unions that utilize a bottom-up leadership model benefit from their members' evolving politics, leading to larger political footprints (White,

2020). Bottom-up unions are more likely to be interested in housing and healthcare, for example, than their traditional counterparts.

### **Anti-Union Tactics**

Because unions maintain such a high degree of political influence, anti-unionists have turned to a couple of crucial tactics for dismantling their power: Anti-union litigation and rhetoric. Any influence that teacher unions have represents successful resistance to anti-union tactics. Therefore, to understand teacher union influence, one must first understand anti-union tactics. Although they may not adhere to a single political strategy (Kirst, 2007), anti-unionists work towards a common goal; to limit teacher union power (Shelton, 2017).

Anti-unionism has been motivated by various factors depending on the historical context of those motivations. For example, during the red scares of the early and mid-twentieth century, anti-union goals were motivated, at least in part, by anti-communism. During these periods, any collective action was susceptible to allegations of communism, regardless of the validity of those allegations (Goldstein, 2014; Pawlewicz, 2020). As historical context changed, however, so did the motivations of anti-unionists.

By the 1970s, as the early and mid 20th century's red scares became a distant memory, anti-unionists shifted their focus. Anti-unionists from the 1970s onward have become increasingly motivated by free-market and neoliberal ideals. Such philosophies promote economically unencumbered families, rather than labor unions, as the center of the American economy. Anything that limits family freedom is seen as an enemy of economic progress (Cooper, 2017). As a result, these people frequently claim that teacher unions force teachers to

join their ranks in order to offer communities “inferior” educational services for exorbitant prices (Shelton, 2017). It was precisely these claims which eventually led to the rise of America’s charter schools movement culminating in our country’s first charter school legislation authored by Minnesota legislators in 1991 (Kirst, 2007).

Although their motivations have evolved, anti-unionists’ goals have remained relatively consistent; to limit the power of teacher unions. To reach this goal, anti-unionists have historically used anti-union litigation, anti-union rhetoric, or a combination of both (Eisenberg-Guyot & Hagopian, 2018; Jha, Banerjee & Moller, 2020; Pierson, 2018; Teresa & Good, 2018; Weiner, 2013). Over time these tactics have proven consistently vexing to teacher unions who have to remain ever defensive to ensure their ability to advocate for teachers (Goldstein, 2014; Kirst, 2007; Shelton, 2017).

Over the last forty years, anti-union litigation has seen great success in dismantling teacher union power (Rachleff, 2012). Twelve times in the previous forty years, The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation (NRTW) has at least partially funded successful federal anti-union litigation (National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, 2020). One such success came in 2014 after *Harris v. Quinn*. Seen as a precursor to *Janus v. AFSCME*, *Harris v. Quinn* declared the mandatory collection of union dues from publicly contracted healthcare workers unconstitutional (Gould, 2015). This case created a precedent for eliminating compulsory union dues of any kind, which teacher unions struggle to navigate today (Pierson, 2018; Eisenberg-Guyot & Hagopian, 2018).

While salient, *Harris V. Quinn* was far from the first supreme court victory for anti-unionists. As far back as 1977, the NRTW has been trying cases in our nation's highest court. *Aboud v. Detroit Board of Education* was the first of these cases (National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, 2020). This case was a watershed moment in the history of anti-unionism. It created a precedent for the court's erosion of union power by finding the use of union dues unconstitutional if those funds were used to do anything other than negotiate contracts. In other words, unions were prohibited from spending money on anything that may signal a political point of view (Rehmus, 1980; Schultz, 2005). In practice, this rule proved challenging to uphold as union members' expression of political perspectives could be counted as unpaid hours (Schultz, 2005). Nonetheless, the case made way for many anti-union suits at both national and state levels.

One such state-level legal challenge to union power came in 2014 with the *Vergara v. California* case. In this case, a California court eliminated two fundamental union protections after anti-union litigation was brought against the state. On the chopping block were teacher tenure, as well as "last in, first out" and dismissal statutes. These provisions, negotiated by California teacher unions, protected teachers from causeless firing by setting up a rigorous system for proving misconduct and ensured that the most experienced teachers were the last to be laid off. In essence, they protected teacher job security (Gottlieb, 2018; Superfine, 2016). The decision, in this case, was overturned by a California court of appeals in 2016 (*Vergara Overturned*, 2016) but, nonetheless, represents a growing threat to teacher unions. Long-standing union protections can no longer be taken for granted.

Of all the cases supported by the NRTW, the case which has the most significant bearing on this study took place just two years ago. In 2018, the Supreme Court ruled in *Janus v. AFSCME* that all mandatory union fees in the public sector were unconstitutional. This decision dealt a symbolic blow to teacher unions. Any dues they collect, from now on, must be voluntarily obtained (Pierson, 2018; Eisenberg-Guyot & Hagopian, 2018). Although this decision's long-term impact is unknown, the case created an unprecedented potential free-rider problem for teacher unions.

In this context, free-riders are defined as teachers who do not financially contribute to unions yet benefit from the union's contract negotiations. So far, teacher unions have maintained most of their members and have therefore not yet had to contend with a severe free-rider problem. However, the 2018 Supreme Court decision still represented an existential threat to teacher unions. Teachers are now legally able to pull financial support from their union, at any time and for any reason (Pierson, 2018). The possibility of pulled support may explain the rapid changes to teacher activism described previously. To maintain support among its members, unions must resort to new strategies, which will be the subject of this study.

Arguably, the most important tactic used by anti-unionists comes from the malignment of public schools, teachers, and the unions that represent them. Anti-union rhetoric is, after all, used to justify every other tactic described above. The rhetoric used to describe public schools and their teachers has become increasingly hostile over the last twenty years (Kane & Newman, 2019). Anti-unionists rely heavily on the stereotype that public school teachers are greedy, uncaring, and bad at their jobs (Young, 2011; Kane & Newman, 2019). In fact, anti-unionists

frequently attack union members rather than unions themselves. These attacks characterize union members as “overpaid,” “undeserving,” and “corrupt” and are consistently picked up by high-profile newspapers such as the New York Times and Los Angeles Times. As the publication of these opinions became increasingly commonplace, popular support of unions declined by as much as ten percent between 1946 and 1985 (Kane & Newman, 2019).

In response to this attention, unionists often fire back with data, which indicates the high teacher retention, decision-making power, salaries, and overall job satisfaction felt by teachers in unionized schools (Lovenheim, 2009; Roch & Sai, 2017; Vachon & Ma, 2015). However, anti-union rhetoric persists (Young, 2011; Kane & Newman, 2019). Some of this rhetoric may be attributed to gender stereotypes and the expectations of teachers.

The role that gender plays in contemporary anti-union rhetoric is not fully explored by existing literature. However, the historical link between anti-feminism and anti-teacher unionism can not be ignored. While the progressive movement gained traction during the early twentieth century, teacher unionists across the country drew repeated connections between their unions’ success and women’s liberation (D’Amico, 2017; Goldstein, 2014; Oram, 2007). Early iterations of teacher unions in Cleveland, Chicago, New York, and Boston all publicly supported suffrage and equal pay for women (D’Amico, 2017).

As unions increasingly supported feminist agendas, their opponents’ claims became increasingly misogynistic. For example, following the New York City School Board decision to maintain differences in pay between men and women, the New York Times published an editorial arguing that payment was due to “the primary facts of human nature” (New York Times

Editorial Board, 1907). Essentially, the New York Times argued that men should be paid more than women because they are innately more skilled. Far from unique, statements like this were commonplace in teacher union debates well into the 1930s (D'Amico, 2017; Oram, 2007). These types of arguments may have been the historical antecedents to more contemporary anti-union rhetoric.

Today, anti-union rhetoric is not nearly as direct as it used to be. Anti-unionists rarely invoke overtly sexist rhetoric to defame teacher unions like they used to. Nonetheless, anti-unionists still invoke gendered rhetoric in an attempt to disable teacher unions. During the 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin teacher strike, for example, Anti-unionists argued that the union's calls for "independent rights," such as tenure and salary increases, undermined their roles as caretakers. Because Hortonville's teachers, most of whom were women, had to care for dependent children, it was seen as "offensive" to advocate for anyone other than children (Schirmer, 2017). The arguments used fifty years ago in Hortonville have been repeatedly used by anti-unionists as recently as Chicago's 2012 teachers strike when The Chicago Tribune called the strike evidence of the CTUs abandonment of children (Ashby & Bruno, 2016).

### **Conceptual Framework**

To analyze the clash between union and anti-union forces, Mr. Stromberg will be using conflict theory. Conflict theory asserts that society is inherently competitive because people in society are forced to compete over limited resources to survive. To a conflict theorist, this competition permeates every relationship with unequal access to resources (Collins & Sanders, 2016). For example, the relationship between teacher unions and school administrators is

inherently conflicted because both want the same thing, to maximize their access to financial resources.

Unfortunately, in a world with limited resources and competing interests, both parties' satisfaction is impossible (Jackson, 2009). Instead, conflict theorists argue, ruling classes are incentivized to exploit as much labor from their workers as possible. Doing this maximizes their financial reward to the detriment of the working class. Conflict theorists see this relationship as increasingly conflicted over time, as the ruling and working classes become polarized over their desire for resources and survival (Collins, 2012).

Although fundamentally accurate, this description can obscure the often subtle ways that conflict theory impacts teachers' work. To study teacher conflicts, Mr. Stromberg prefers definitions that do not evoke grandiose struggles over life and death. Far from being hyperbolic in 2016, prominent conflict theorist Randall Collins boiled conflict theory down to people's tendency to be "steered towards satisfaction and away from dissatisfaction" (p.21). In this way, Collins positions the goals of workers and their employers as fundamentally the same, which is where conflict arises.

Conflict theory, as presented by Collins, maps quite well onto twenty-first-century teacher conflicts. American teachers have formed unions in an attempt to wrestle control of schools away from district administrators. Teacher unions clash with administrators over limited financial resources, which they hope to distribute to teachers. At the same time, District administrators wish to limit the financial resources allocated to teacher unions and, in the process, maintain control over schools (Goldstien, 2014; Todd-Breland, 2018). The relationship

between teacher unions and school administrators is, therefore, not only inherently conflicted but also extremely tense.

School administrators are not merely at odds with unions; they fear them. This fear derives from an understanding of teacher union influence and its potential to amass power (Cooper & Sureau, 2008). Using collective bargaining, strikes, and political endorsements, teacher unions can and do amass power in ways that often set back district administrators' goals (Cooper & Sureau, 2008; Goldstein, 2014). This was the case in 2012 when after a CTU strike, CPS was forced to make several important concessions, costing the city millions of dollars (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Todd-Breland, 2018).

To preempt the growth of unions and prevent further drain of financial resources, anti-unionists frequently claim that teachers are greedy, uncaring and that the unions representing them are entirely self-interested (Young, 2011; Kane & Newman, 2019). Through the lens of conflict theory, the purpose of these claims becomes clear; to hoard financial resources by discrediting teacher unions.

The more successfully financial resources are hoarded, the tenser the conflict over them becomes. Over time, financial conflict becomes polarized so intensely that debates are framed as more than just compensation disputes (Collins, 2012). Ideals of opportunity and economic mobility seem to hang in the balance as American students born into poverty become increasingly likely to remain impoverished their whole lives. This phenomenon is due, in part, to the fact that families with wealth can afford both a higher quality education and more years of

schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Although undoubtedly critical, class is not the only factor that influences anti-union conflicts.

Anti-unionism and the struggle for public education control are complicated by dimensions of race and gender, which is not fully explored by the literature but can similarly be explained by conflict theory. To better understand these factors, Mr. Stromberg has looked at literature that describes the relationship between teaching, race, and gender. For example, Latina teachers in Texas are often saddled with extra caretaker responsibilities, working long hours to look after undocumented students. These additional responsibilities are not only uncompensated but also gender-specific. Male teachers in the same schools are rarely asked to take on the same responsibilities (Sosa-Provencio, 2019).

Similarly, Black male teachers are often expected to take on greater disciplinary responsibilities than their white counterparts for no extra pay (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). Uncompensated labor, which disproportionately falls on marginalized groups, is a strong example of conflict theory in action. This is maybe best described by Randall Collins and Stephen Sanderson. In 2016 the pair wrote that in societies with firm ethnic and class hierarchies, like the United States (Bowles & Gintis, 2002), dominant groups use their privilege to “reserve better positions for themselves” (p.40). This explains why positions that require uncompensated labor are disproportionately distributed to women and people of color. White men, who maintain high positions in the social hierarchy, reserve jobs for themselves that infrequently require uncompensated labor.

Lastly, and most importantly, for this study, anti-union rhetoric also fits well within the framework of conflict theory. The malignment of teacher unions legitimizes divestment from public schools by characterizing unionized teachers as undeserving of compensation. Divestment of public education leads to an escalation of the conflict between unionists and anti-unionists. After all, in the public sector, taxes are the limited resource with which organizations fight for control. Considering this conflict, it is curious that the CTU continues to hold such strong political influence in Chicago. Here is where the literature on conflict theory seems to run out of answers.

Through the course of Mr. Stromberg's literature review, four things became clear. First, teacher unions traditionally maintain a limited political scope. Second, through social media and a focus on social justice, contemporary teacher activists are reshaping how teacher unions function. Third, the stagnant demographics of union leadership is a contributing factor in the rise of teacher activism. Fourth, anti-union tactics have led, in some cases, to the successful dismantling, reconfiguration, and reduction of teacher union power. Although Mr. Stromberg's literature review offered many answers, it did not help him understand the CTU's unique organizational strategies or how it has responded to anti-unionism.

Using conflict theory, it becomes clear that the struggle between teacher unions and activists, on the one hand, and anti-unionists, on the other, is a struggle over access to resources. Each of these factions competes for control of the state's financial resources. Teacher unions and teacher activists hope to maintain and grow their influence to ensure constructive working conditions and gain greater access to due-paying members. Anti-unionists wish to limit teacher

unions' and activists' influence and divert the state's financial resources away from public education. Although conflict theory helps to elucidate the struggle described above, it does little to explain the CTU's persistent political influence in the face of a robust anti-union movement.

### **Research Question**

Considering the anti-union rhetoric and actions used to justify teacher unions' disempowerment through anti-union litigation, the CTU's persistent political influence is, so far, counterintuitive. Therefore, the question central to this paper is: How has the CTU retained its political influence in the face of anti-unionism? The framework of conflict theory, as described above, will help Mr. Stromberg to explore anti-union rhetoric and the ways the CTU responds to it.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

Once Mr. Stromberg literature review and conceptual framework were complete, he was still left with a question: How has the CTU retained its political influence in the face of anti-unionism? Using discourse analysis, Mr. Stromberg collected and analyzed data from CTU organizers and anti-unionists to answer this question. Below, he describes the data he collected and the discourse analysis tools he used to analyze it. Additionally, he briefly discusses the reliability, validity, and limitations of this study.

#### **Research Methodology**

To answer his research question, Mr. Stromberg used discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a methodology that studies how language is used within social and historical contexts. This methodology is commonly used to analyze how language helps people communicate, cooperate, build or destroy relationships and institutions, and advantage themselves (Gee, 2014). This last use of language will be most pertinent to his study.

Discourse analysis is most appropriate for answering Mr. Stromberg's research question. Without discourse analysis, he would be unable to identify the often subtle ways anti-union tactics work. Conversely, he would also be unable to determine the ways that union leadership responds to anti-unionism. The following research methodology is not only the best way to conduct a study in this case but the only way to do so with sufficient rigor.

To study the complexities of language, researchers using discourse analysis typically focus on one of two approaches: “Grammar” or “Ideas, Issues, and Themes.” A “Grammar” approach focuses on the grammatical structure of discourse, while a “Ideas, Issues, and Themes” approach focuses on the historical, political, and philosophical content of discourse (Gee, 2014). Because Mr. Stromberg is interested in the political discourse inherent in Chicago’s teacher union conflict; he focuses on the second of these approaches. The approach allowed him to directly analyze the rhetoric’s political content rather than dwelling on grammatical minutia. Once data was collected, he reviewed it with his research question in mind. Mr. Stromberg also analyzed it by examining the claims made by different actors and how they speak to larger historical themes and organizations, such as CPS. He paid particular attention to claims which spoke to the themes uncovered in his literature review; the scope of union politics, teacher union activism, and the relationships between gender, race, and union leadership. Doing this helped Mr. Stromberg better understand why the CTU acts the way it does in response to anti-union claims.

### **Research Data**

This study required a snapshot of real-time political discourse between the CTU and anti-unionists. Twitter offers this snapshot better than traditional news organizations, which have to verify and edit claims before publication. Traditional news is simply too slow to keep up with real-time political discourse about the CTU. Being a simple, text-based, medium Twitter can also move quicker than other social media sites, like Instagram, which ask for pictures, videos, music, and many other options that require time to produce.

Following his determination that analyzing Twitter would be the best way to study the CTU, Mr. Stromberg collected tweets from public accounts operated by the following people and organizations: The CTU, Jesse Sharkey, Stacy Davis Gates, The CTU Latinx Caucus, Michelle Gunderson, The NRTW, John Kass, Kristen McQueary, Lori Lightfoot, and Janice K. Jackson. Each of these accounts was chosen because of their contemporary relevance in CTU conflicts. Jesse Sharkey, current CTU president, and Stacy Davis Gates, current CTU vice-president, are prolific tweeters who use the medium to respond to anti-union tactics. The CTU Latinx Caucus is a group of Latinx educators and support staff in CPS who work closely with Chicago's Caucus of Rank and File Educators. The Latinx Caucus frequently uses their Latinx and educator identities to advocate for the CTU's agenda. Michelle Gunderson is the co-chair of the CTUs caucus of rank and file educators and an avid Twitter user. The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation is an organization that pursues cases that disempower unions. Most notably, they brought *Janus v. AFSCME* to the Supreme Court. They also contribute much to anti-union discourse on Twitter. John Kass and Kristen McQueary are current and former Chicago Tribune columnists, respectively, and serve as members of the Tribune editorial board. Both frequently use Twitter to criticize the CTU. Lori Lightfoot, Chicago's Mayor, and Janice K. Jackson, CEO of CPS, are similarly critical but often in subtler ways. They use Twitter to delegitimize the CTU's agenda, something that the union often responds to directly. Along with the official CTU account, these accounts represent a broad scope of political discourse about the CTU.

I used the following keywords to search the accounts listed above: Chicago Teachers Union, Chicago Public Schools, Strike, Social Justice, Teacher(s), Contract, School(s),

Education, Janus, #faircontractnow, #putitinwriting, #reopensafely, #policefreeschools, American Federation of Teachers, SEIU, Right to Work and, Right to Work Committee. Each of these terms was chosen because of their relevance to CTU conflicts within the study's time frame. Keywords with hashtags were relevant trending Twitter hashtags during this period. Mr. Stromberg limited his Twitter searches to posts made between June 23rd, 2019, and November 30th, 2019. The specifics of what he looked for in this data are described in this chapter's data analysis plan section.

The limited scope of this study was chosen for specific reasons. June 23rd, 2019, marks one week before the expiration of the CTU's contract with CPS. Collecting tweets from this date forward captures how discourse changed in the days leading up to contract negotiations and the 2019 strike. November 30th, 2019, was chosen as the end date for data collection because it represents a turning point in the CTU strike. One month earlier, on October 30th, 2019, the CTU and CPS reached a contract agreement, effectively ending the union's strike. A month after the deal provided sufficient time to collect Twitter discourse relevant to this decision.

Following the development of the search parameters described above, Mr. Stromberg utilized Twitter's "advanced search" feature to collect and download all tweets that were 1) produced within the study's timeframe, 2) included at least one of the study's keywords, 3) produced by one of the ten Twitter accounts in the study. The advanced search feature allowed him to input all of these parameters and then download ten spreadsheets, one for each of the accounts in that study, that included all relevant tweets. This process yielded 1,830 total tweets.

## Data Analysis

The data Mr. Stromberg collected is analyzed using discourse analysis procedures. Discourse analysis methodology calls on researchers to use seven linguistic building tasks to contextualize their data (Gee, 2014). Used here, the term “building task” refers to the intended purpose of language. The seven tasks described by Gee are (a) significance, (b) practices, (c) identities, (d) relationships, (e) politics, (f) connections, and (g) signs. Each of these tasks was used to understand a different aspect of the data he collected. These tools, described in greater detail below, helped Mr. Stromberg answer his research question by providing lenses through which he analyzed the social and historical contexts, political strategies, and purposes of tweets. These perspectives offered ways to analyze and ultimately understand the subtleties that have allowed the CTU to remain politically influential despite persistent anti-unionism.

Mr. Stromberg began his organizational process by building ten spreadsheets to house all his data, one for each of the Twitter accounts he used. Mr. Stromberg copied and pasted relevant tweets into the rows of each spreadsheet. Each spreadsheet also had eight columns. In the first column, he recorded the date of each tweet. In the second through eighth columns, he indicated whether a building task was used in a particular tweet. Column two indicated the use of the significance task, column three the practices task, column four the identities task, column five the relationships task, column six the politics task, column seven the connections task, and column eight the signs task.

In the cell where a tweet’s row and a task’s column intersect, he used a concise coding system to track how each task was used. Tasks used to promote the CTU were marked with a 1,

tasks used to malign or disenfranchise the CTU were marked with a 2, and tasks used to promote a third party or agenda, peripherally related to the Chicago teacher conflict, were marked with a 3. Coding the data in this way allowed Mr. Stromberg to analyze large quantities of data in a way that could be feasibly completed on his timeline. Once all the data was collected and organized, Mr. Stromberg went back through it to draw conclusions about how discourse was used, by which actors, and for what purpose.

To identify themes in the data, Mr. Stromberg analyzed Twitter accounts, one building task at a time, and one number at a time. Starting, for example, with Lori Lightfoot's account, he first looked at all her tweets that utilized the significance task to promote the CTU, tweets marked in his spreadsheet with a 1. After looking for similarities among those tweets, he then looked for similarities among significance task tweets marked with a 2 and then those marked with a 3. He repeated these steps for every building task in all ten of his spreadsheets, identifying themes both within single Twitter accounts and across multiple accounts.

One of the seven building tasks, The "significance" task, is used in language to make something seem more or less significant. This study's challenge was to find a way to identify this task within single, relatively brief tweets. After a bit of experimentation, Mr. Stromberg ultimately landed on a system that he found useful. Any tweet that included exclamation marks, words in all capital letters, or the cost of something were coded as using the significance task. These three parameters narrowed Mr. Stromberg's significance tweets to those that highlighted the magnitude or importance of an issue.

Another of the seven building tasks, The “practices” task, is used to enact or enable specific actions. Using the practices lens, Mr. Stromberg analyzed how tweets enabled political action by unionists and anti-unionists alike. Tweets were coded as using the practices task if they asked followers to do something specific. CTU organizers, for example, often asked followers to join them on the picket line, while union detractors more often asked followers to read articles or listen to podcasts. Either way, tweeters utilized the practices task to enable their followers to do something that would support their perspective. Unionists asked their followers to join them on the picket line, thereby growing their physical presence. Anti-unionists asked their followers to read and listen to things that legitimized their political perspective.

The “identities” task, the third building task, is used to build and foster both speakers’ and readers’ specific identities. Using the identities lens, Mr. Stromberg considered both what identity a speaker was attempting to call up through their tweets and for what purpose. For example, a CTU member’s identity as a caretaker might be called up to enlist sympathy from an audience. This sympathy can then be channeled into support for legislation that will protect the CTU. Alternatively, a caretaker identity could be used to foster negative sentiment toward the CTU, especially if the organization is portrayed as protective of negligent teachers. In order to identify this task in relatively short tweets, Mr. Stromberg looked for tweets that used personal pronouns such as I, my, or me. Within his data, these pronouns were typically followed by information about the author of a tweet, illuminating what that author wanted their followers to know about their identity.

The fourth building task, the “relationships” task, is used to enable or enact specific relationships between speakers and readers. Using this lens allowed Mr. Stromberg to consider what type of relationship a speaker was attempting to enact through their tweets and for what purpose. For example, a member of the CTU may remind CPS administrators that they have an obligation, as their employer, to fulfill the employment contract. In this situation, the employee-employer relationship is enacted to achieve a specific purpose. Words like “Brothers,” “Sisters,” and “Friends” may also be used to help foster symbolic relationships between tweeters and followers.

The “politics” task is a building task used to signal what is right or good from a political perspective. Using the politics lens, Mr. Stromberg analyzed how tweets produced during his study’s time frame communicated the tweeter’s perspective on right or good behavior. For example, Lori Lightfoot’s repeated references to lost instructional time during the 2019 strike may indicate her belief that it is wrong to allow students to miss school over contract disputes. Tweets in this study were coded as using the politics task if they tweeted directly or indirectly about politics or political issues.

The sixth building task, The “connections” task, is used to create or destroy connections between people, ideas, and organizations. Using the connections lens, Mr. Stromberg analyzed how the Twitter users in his study attempted to draw connections and for what purpose. For example, John Kass’s attempt to draw connections between the CTU and the “radical left” may help rationalize his anti-union bias. Tweets were coded using the connections task if they identified real or imagined historical or legal connections between two or more phenomena. The

disputed validity of these connections has no bearing on whether or not the task is being used. Even illusory connections can be drawn using the connections task.

Lastly, the “signs” task is used to emphasize or de-emphasize the relative importance of one language or “sign system” over another. Using this lens, Mr. Stromberg analyzed what kind of language tweeters used and for what purpose. For example, the CTU Latinx Caucus used disproportionately high rates of Spanish compared to all other Twitter accounts in his study. This may be attributed to the attempted legitimization of the Latinx identity in Chicago politics. In addition to Spanish language tweets, Mr. Stromberg coded the use of photographs in tweets as utilization of the signs task. Photographs were used at least once, by every single one of the accounts in this study, to illustrate the ideas in tweets more vividly. During its 2019 strike, the CTU tweeted dozens of photos from the picket line, which demonstrated the determination and ferocity of unionists in ways that a brief tweet could not.

### **Validity**

Validity, in this case, is essentially a question of accuracy. Is the data Mr. Stromberg collected an accurate representation of the CTU’s political discourse? Are his interpretations of that data similarly accurate? Although discourse analysis is a highly interpretive methodology, prone to inaccuracy, Mr. Stromberg has done a lot of work to limit that inaccuracy and bolster his study’s validity. The validity of his findings was born out of five weeks of data collection and analysis. He scoured his ten chosen Twitter accounts for tweets that included at least one of his keywords and were produced within his timeframe. After about two weeks of this, he came up with 1,830 tweets that matched his criteria. Mr. Stromberg then analyzed the tweets using a

rigorous discourse analysis methodology, which required him to consider them through the lenses of (a) significance, (b) practices, (c) identities, (d) relationships, (e) politics, (f) connections, and (g) signs. The volume, diversity, and relevance of the data Mr. Stromberg collected makes him confident that his findings are valid. However, because discourse analysis is a qualitative and highly interpretive methodology, it is possible that Mr. Stromberg's own biases influenced his understanding of the data.

For five years, Mr. Stromberg taught at an un-unionized charter school in Chicago. During this time, he became increasingly interested in the politics of the CTU, in part because he was an outsider to that process. This interest never waned. When he left the classroom in 2019 to pursue a master's degree, he did so with the express purpose of studying teacher activism and educational politics. Mr. Stromberg thinks his seven-year immersion in political history and sociology may have made him hyper-sensitive to political language. This hyper-sensitivity may have led to an overestimation of the politicization of his data. Regardless of his interpretive bias, however, the overall validity of his findings remains intact. Mr. Stromberg's bias does not impact the fact that the tweets he collected were produced by actors relevant to the 2019 CTU strike and represented a wide range of political points of view.

### **Limitations**

This study aims to understand the CTU better; however, understanding is limited to a particular time and specific Twitter accounts. The data analyzed in this case is limited to tweets produced between June 23rd, 2019, and November 30th, 2019. As a result, conclusions drawn from that data are also limited to that period. Similarly, conclusions are limited by the Twitter

accounts analyzed for this study. Although the ten accounts chosen for analysis represent a wide swath of political perspectives, they may not fully represent the political discourse on this matter.

Because the data collected for this study is limited to a specific time and specific accounts, the conclusions drawn from this study are similarly limited. The data collected for this study captures the political perspectives of the ten Twitter accounts listed above, between June 23rd, 2019, and November 30th, 2019. Any predictions about the study's applicability to the future or actors outside of those selected should be read skeptically. Additionally, this study is limited by Twitter itself. Twitter may accurately reflect its users' perspectives, but those users only represent a small fraction of the public. Therefore, even if all tweets could be feasibly collected and analyzed, the data they produce would not necessarily represent the full diversity of public opinions on any issue.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to understand how the CTU maintains its political relevance in the face of anti-unionism. To answer this question, Mr. Stromberg spent five weeks collecting and analyzing tweets from ten Twitter accounts relevant to the 2019 CTU strike. These accounts were selected because their authors represented a diversity of political perspectives and racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

For the sake of clarity, Mr. Stromberg has broken up his data into three categories based on the patterns and themes he found while conducting his study. The first of these categories is CTU organizers. CTU organizers are characterized, among other things, by their advocacy for teacher unions and the 2019 strike. The second category is what Mr. Stromberg calls a CTU detractor. CTU detractors' characterization includes, but is not limited to, their roles as CPS district administrators and conservative political columnists. The third category described in this chapter is what Mr. Stromberg calls a general union detractor. These tweeters are either national anti-union advocates or conservative political columnists, and although they did tweet about the CTU, they spent most of their time tweeting about unions more generally. The following table illustrates how tweets from all three of these categories were broken up once analyzed using the discourse analysis procedures described in the previous chapter.

Table 1. Use of Building Building Tasks per Tweeter Category by Percentage of a Category's Total Tweets

Tweeter Category	Building Tasks						
	Significance	Practices	Identities	Relationship	Politics	Connections	Signs
CTU Organizer	26.3%	7.8%	43.2%	8.8%	97.7%	9.4%	84.2%
CTU Detractor	40.7%	16.6%	37.9%	32.4%	51.6%	6.0%	77.7%
General Union Detractor	10.9%	37.8%	7.0%	6.1%	98.8%	31.6%	91.8%

Of the 1,830 tweets analyzed, 1,209 were produced by CTU organizers, 265 by CTU detractors, and 357 by general union detractors. Because each category had such different tweet totals, Mr. Stromberg decided to break up the data by a percentage of a category's whole. For example, 318 or 26.3% of all CTU organizer tweets utilized the significance task; therefore, the cell where the CTU organizer row and significance task column meet contains "26.3%". Most of the tweets he analyzed utilized at least two of the building tasks described in the previous chapter. However, those tasks were not distributed evenly. As illustrated by the table above, CTU organizers utilized the politics task 46% more often than CTU detractors and utilized the practices task 30% less often than general union detractors. Mr. Stromberg uses these discrepancies, and others like them, in the sections that follow to draw conclusions and ultimately answer his research question.

## CTU Organizers

Five of the Twitter accounts Mr. Stromberg analyzed for this study used similar rhetorical strategies to one another and therefore fit within the CTU organizers category. These accounts belong to the following people and organizations: CTU president Jesse Sharkey, CTU vice president Stacy Davis Gates, Caucus of Rank and File Educators co-chair Michelle Gunderson, The CTU Latinx Caucus, and the CTU. These accounts were chosen because of their close association with the CTU; however, Mr. Stromberg found that they shared a lot more in common through his study. All five of the CTU organizers in this study shared fundamental similarities along all seven building tasks, which, when taken together, paint a picture of strategic politicization of identity and blurring of the lines between personal and political spheres.

Significance, the first building task, is used to make language appear more or less significant. The CTU organizers analyzed for this study frequently utilized this task through the use of exclamation marks, capitalized words, and real numbers. The last of these tools was used to demonstrate the magnitude of support for the CTU and the relative cost of their demands compared to other parts of Chicago's budget. Stacy Davis Gates utilized all three of these significance tools on August 28th, 2019, when she tweeted, "The redefinition of #Progressive is happening right now. \$33M for cops in schools. Listen: this will be in a CONTRACT. It is in WRITING... #PutItInWriting!" The use of exclamation points and capitalization here conveys a sense of importance, a sense that the reader should pay close attention to what Gates has to say. Simultaneously, by including real numbers, Gates has demonstrated the magnitude of her problem with the CTU's current contract. Thirty-three million dollars is a lot of money to give to

the CPD, especially when, as claimed by Gates in other tweets, the organization weakens Chicago teachers' ability to do their jobs effectively.

More than any other tweeter category, CTU organizers demonstrated the significance of their ideas through exclamation marks, capitalization, and real numbers. They used exclamation marks twice as often, capitalization two and a half times as often, and real numbers one and a half times as often as any other category. By using these tools so frequently, they brought a sense of urgency and importance to their claims that CTU and general union detractors lacked. Capitalization and exclamation marks were especially important for conveying this urgency because they added a sense of emotional desperation. Reading hundreds of these kinds of tweets almost made Mr. Stromberg feel like he was being yelled at, that the organizers were screaming at him through Twitter, and he believes that was on purpose. What better way to convey significance than thorough screaming. The arguments contained in organizer tweets may still be unconvincing to followers, but at the very least, they will pay attention, which is the first step in ultimately winning popular support.

Identities, the third building task, is used to foster specific identities in both speakers and readers. More than any other category, CTU organizers frequently talked about their personal history and experiences, indicating a fundamental identity task similarity. This was determined, in part, by the frequency with which each category used personal pronouns, including I, us, and we. More than 43% of CTU organizer tweets used these pronouns, while only 37% of CTU detractor tweets and 7% of general union detractors tweets did the same. For example, during the 2019 strike, more than a third of Stacy Davis Gates' tweets used personal pronouns when

discussing her identity or experience, especially in the classroom. She and other tweeters used their roles as educators to legitimize their roles as activists, often describing how as former teachers, they knew more about the challenges students face than their opponents.

Identity and politics are intrinsically linked in all CTU organizer accounts reviewed for this study. Rank and file educators utilized their positions as current and former teachers to legitimize their political claims. Using statements like “I experienced” or “my students” brought tweeters directly into the political conversation. These types of statements imply that CTU organizers know best what students need because they have seen it in their own classrooms. Simultaneously, this personalization delegitimizes the claims made by detractors who may have no teaching or professional education experience.

Politics, the fifth building task, is used to signal what is good or right from a political perspective. Nearly all the CTU organizer tweets in this study were political. In fact, of their 1,209 tweets, all but 28 of them were political. Their accounts almost exclusively tweeted about Chicago politics, often arguing that the CTU’s case was stronger than that of anti-unionists. As a part of their politicization, organizers frequently used hashtags such as #strikerready and #WhenWeFightWeWin to indicate their support for a strike, and #putitinwriting, to signal their desire for additions to the CTU contract. These hashtags, and others like them, were used to demonstrate a political perspective and mobilize supporters. They were used so often by organizers that sixty percent of all the organizer tweets collected for this study used hashtags, a number far exceeding hashtag usage by CTU detractors (32%) and general union detractors (49%). This politicization may be linked to the strong emphasis organizers placed on identity.

For many rank and file educators, the personalization of their political rhetoric may be more than strategy. It may be an honest reflection of their frustration with the state of public education. If CTU organizers see their teaching roles as central to their identities, they may feel personally attacked by the devaluation of schools. If this is true, then it is no wonder why CTU organizers are so political on their personal Twitter accounts. For them, the lines between the personal and political spheres may already be blurred. Fortunately, this blurring can be strategically taught to followers. Blurring the lines between political and personal spheres may draw more CTU supporters directly into the conflict by assuring them that they do not have to be professional political operatives to be involved in politics; all they need is a personal stake. The CTU can mobilize a lot of potential support this way by claiming that all their followers have a personal and, therefore, political stake in what happens to the CTU.

Following a full evaluation of how CTU organizers used the seven-building tasks, it seems clear that this group uses Twitter to advance a strategy of political inclusiveness. To do this, they use their identities as well as the personalization of CTU issues to blur the lines between the political and personal spheres. From the CTU's perspective, all a person needs to become involved in the conflict is an opinion that can be legitimately based on personal or emotional issues. In other words, people do not have to be experts on education policy; they just have to care about teachers, students, racism, economic inequality, or any of the other focuses of CTU organizers. This strategy helps explain, in part, how the CTU has maintained its political influence in the face of anti-unionism. One of the CTU's biggest strengths is its size. However, it seems that the organization understands that even 20,000 members may not be enough to sway

public policy. To maintain its influence, the union has opened its doors to non-member participation. Each member, many of whom are Twitter users, can mobilize hundreds or thousands of followers, functionally multiplying the number of active participants in the CTU conflict.

### **CTU Detractors**

Three of the Twitter accounts Mr. Stromberg analyzed for this study used similar rhetorical strategies to one another and therefore fit within the CTU detractors category. These accounts belong to Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, CPS CEO Janice K. Jackson, and Chicago Tribune columnist John Kass. These accounts were chosen because of their relevance, direct or indirect, to the 2019 CTU strike; however, like the previous category, Mr. Stromberg discovered that they shared fundamental similarities along all seven building tasks, which paint a picture of diversionary tactics when taken together.

Discourse analysis allowed Mr. Stromberg to uncover findings in this area that diverged significantly from his expectations. Although CTU detractors certainly used the directly maligning rhetoric indicated by previous literature, their tweets focused primarily on more coded arguments. By diverting their followers' attention away from the strike and demonstrating support for the status quo, tweeters in this category were able to detract from the CTU's perspective without drawing the ire of Chicago's populace which is, in general, rather supportive of public school teachers. The following section describes the subtle and often coded ways that CTU detractors used Twitter in order to prevent their followers from turning against them.

When it came to the third building task, identity, the accounts in this category shared a critical similarity; they put a relatively low emphasis on identity, especially compared to CTU organizers. Accounts in this category used personal pronouns such as I, we, and our, infrequently and rarely, if ever, talked about their personal history or experiences. When these tweeters did discuss themselves, they typically did so in a non-political context. For example, on November 21st, 2019, less than three weeks after the conclusion of the CTU's 2019 strike, John Kass tweeted, "My father didn't finish school. He went to war instead. But he was a great teacher." This tweet speaks to Kass's working-class identity, but it does little to advance his political perspective. By contrast, CTU organizers frequently used their identity to make political points.

While CTU organizers frequently tweeted about themselves and their roles as educators, their detractors rarely tweeted about themselves or their experiences. Mr. Stromberg believes this was done strategically. By omitting their own stories from tweets, CTU detractors depersonalized the CTU conflict. This depersonalization helps detractors ignore students' social-emotional needs because it shifts the conversation away from student experience and onto financial costs. By keeping emotion out of the equation, detractors are free to make calculated decisions based on financial cost, which they believe is ultimately better for Chicago.

Another critical similarity between CTU detractors was revealed by looking at the politics building task data. According to this data, CTU detractors were far less political than their CTU organizer counterparts. While nearly every tweet written by CTU organizers was inherently political, CTU detractors tweeted apolitically a significant number of times, even during the 2019 strike negotiations. For example, on October 10th, 2019, Two weeks after CTU

members voted to authorize a potential strike and one week before the strike began, Mayor Lori Lightfoot tweeted, “BLUE RIBBON AWARD: Prescott Elementary School awarded national blue ribbon distinction, a program that recognizes outstanding public schools.” Although there may be political undertones to this tweet, there is nothing explicitly political about it. At the same time, CTU organizers tweeted almost exclusively about politics and the 2019 strike. CTU detractors were simply less political than CTU organizers in this study.

The relative apolitical nature of CTU detractor tweets can be explained by diversionary political tactics. The relatively apolitical nature of tweets in this category is a diversionary strategy that channels Twitter users away from the CTU conflict. Instead of engaging actively in the debate, detractors tweeted only occasionally about the CTU before returning to apolitical topics, such as a school's athletic achievements. Tweeting about sports during a hugely consequential and historically significant strike seems almost absurd unless those tweets are understood as part of a coherent strategy to distract readers from the issues at hand.

Like the politics task, signs was used relatively infrequently by CTU detractors. Detractors used photographs, a kind of visual language meant to communicate things words cannot, in 70% of their tweets. By contrast, CTU organizers used photographs in 82% of their tweets and general union detractors in 80% of their tweets, not to mention the fact that the CTU Latinx Caucus occasionally tweeted in Spanish, something that detractors never did. Varying the types of signs used in tweets expands the number of people who can understand and engage in those tweets. If CTU organizers' use of varied language is understood as a way to draw people into the conflict, then detractors may be doing the opposite. In other words, organizers appear to

be inclusive, while detractors appear to be exclusive. Instead of enabling participation from a wider range of followers, detractors tweet things meant to satisfy their existing followers. The contrast here indicates a critical difference between CTU detractors and other types of tweeters.

Whether they be CPS district administrators or simply conservative columnists, all the actors in this category had a political stake in the outcome of the 2019 CTU strike, which may explain their diversionary tactics. District administrators were incentivized to end the strike as quickly as possible with as little cost to taxpayers as possible. Lori Lightfoot was especially vulnerable in this regard because she is an elected official. She might lose reelection if her term is sufficiently marred by a protracted and expensive fight with the CTU. Janice K. Jackson is also quite vulnerable in this way because her role as CPS CEO is appointed by the mayor. In other words, if Lightfoot loses reelection, Jackson would also likely lose her job. While John Kass's job is not as vulnerable as Lightfoot's or Jackson's, his political philosophy still runs counter to increased public education investment. Kass is a self-described political conservative. Much of what he tweets reflects his world view that the government overreaches to the detriment of taxpayers. Therefore, all three of the actors in this category have an incentive to become defensive when faced with a CTU strike. They all have something to lose, and they guard against that loss with the types of diversions described above.

### **General Union Detractors**

Two of the Twitter accounts Mr. Stromberg analyzed for this study used similar rhetorical strategies to one another and therefore fit within the category of general union detractors. These accounts belong to Chicago Tribune columnist Kristen McQueary and the NRTW. These

accounts were chosen because they represented anti-union perspectives, especially relevant to the 2019 CTU strike; however, Mr. Stromberg also found that they shared critical similarities in all seven building tasks that, when taken together, paint a picture of attempted legitimization of anti-unionism.

Unlike the previous category, general union detractors were able to make more directly maligning claims, about unions, without alienating their followers. Claims made by general union detractors align strongly with previous literature, therefore indicating the staying power of anti-union strategies outside of Chicago. The claims made by general union detractors that unions are greedy and self-interested, for example, mirror claims found in the literature and indicate fundamentally unchanged rhetoric. The following section describes how Mr. Stromberg used discourse analysis to uncover the ways that general union detractors use building tasks in often predictable ways which both legitimize their own perspective and malign unions.

Practices, the second building task, was used much differently by general union detractors than their CTU organizer counterparts. While organizers called on their followers to join them at political events, detractors asked their followers to listen to podcasts and read articles that support their political point of view. For example, on September 16th, the NRTW tweeted, “Recently @RightToWork staff attorneys won a case that freed over a dozen Michigan public school employees from an illegal teachers union dues scheme. Listen to this interview by Mark Mix with @stevegrubershow about the case.” Tweets like this enable followers to reinforce an anti-union world view by directing them to commentators who combine editorial with selective use of evidence to construct consistent arguments.

What is the purpose of exclusively asking followers to engage in anti-union media if not to legitimize that political philosophy? Not only do the articles and podcasts promoted by detractors attempt to legitimize their philosophy, but they do so without grounding the conflict in human stories. While CTU organizers frequently talked about student and teacher experience, detractors seemed to actively avoid the subject, instead focusing on calculated financial costs. For example, on October 29th, 2019, Kristen McQuery tweeted, ‘It isn’t “found” money (from what I understand). It’s the city saying to CPS, you need to pay your own pension costs. State already picked up your normal costs. City has its own problems. Maybe teachers should have to pay more than 2% toward retirements.’ In this case, McQuery used the terms of CPS’s negotiated contract to deflect from issues raised by the union in 2019, namely factors like staffing that would impact student and teacher experiences.

Similar to CTU detractors, general union detractors put a relatively low emphasis on identity and personal experience. Accounts in this category used personal pronouns such as I, we, and our, least frequently and seldom talked about their personal history or experiences. This stands in stark contrast to CTU organizers who frequently referenced their identity and used it to contextualize their political perspectives. Accounts in this category also used capitalization and exclamation marks less frequently than any other category, a fact that may have been influenced by the emotional distance brought on by de-emphasizing identity.

By de-emphasizing identity, general union detractors make union conflicts appear fundamentally political and highly technical. For example, on October 11th, 2019, the NRTW tweeted, “There is no logical reason why union membership would obviate the need for a

constitutional waiver under Janus.” This tweet does not ground arguments in human stories, nor does it use language accessible to those unaccustomed to legal jargon. The difficulty of this type of rhetoric encourages participation only from those people who are already versed in complicated political, historical, or constitutional arguments. In other words, their messaging is fundamentally opposite from unionists, who want all people, regardless of education, to participate. In the same way that CTU organizers use identity and personalization to draw supporters into the conflict, general union detractors de-emphasize identity as a part of their strategy of exclusivity. By emphasizing complex political, constitutional, or historical arguments, general union detractors may deter active participation from those people less versed in the subjects.

Like CTU organizers, general union detractors used the politics task quite frequently. However, unlike organizers, general union detectors used a rhetorical strategy not emphasized by any other category: historical and constitutional connections. No Twitter account analyzed for this study used the politics task quite as often as the NRTW, which utilized the task in 100% of its tweets. It endorsed political policies, admonished unionists around the country, and supported anti-union litigation and legislation, often from a constitutional or historical perspective. For example, on August 30, 2019, the NRTW tweeted, “Five state workers represented by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation (NRTW) said it violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to require public employees to pay union dues without their affirmative consent.” Tweets like this, which place union disputes in a broader historical and legal context, were typical for tweeters in this category

The hyper-politicization of accounts in this category can be understood as part of a broader rhetorical strategy. General union detractors frequently tweeted about politics to overwhelm their followers with anti-union arguments. Because the content of those arguments was consistently emotionless and consistently reasoned, followers of general union detractors may have been left with a sense of clarity, a belief that unionists could not possibly make such infallible cases. However, interpreting these arguments as correct relies entirely on a reader's political perspective.

Both of the accounts in this category were concerned with more than the CTU conflict. They tweeted about the CTU and were often critical of it, but they also tweeted about unions across the country in many different fields. These tweeters did not just criticize teacher unions. They attacked auto worker unions, nursing unions, and many others from a philosophically consistent point of view that unions are inherently oppressive and unconstitutional. The philosophical legitimization lens explains why general union detractors tweeted least frequently about their own identity, instead focusing on broader legal or historical appeals. These tweeters did not talk about themselves or their experiences. Instead, they tweeted their perspectives as facts, supported by supreme court cases, the constitution, and historical precedent. This strategy stands in stark contrast to that used by CTU organizers, who rely heavily on emotional appeals, especially those involving student experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Following the analysis of Mr. Stromberg's data, it became clear that each tweeter category, (a) CTU organizers, (b) CTU detractors, and (c) general union detractors, had very

different tweeting styles that represented three different political strategies. These political strategies are informed by policy agendas, which are critical to understanding the motivations of Twitter users embroiled in the CTU conflict, and ultimately how the CTU has remained politically relevant in the face of anti-unionism.

The central strategy of CTU organizers was to blur the lines between the political and personal spheres. This strategy was likely informed by the desire to bring more CTU supporters into the conflict but, on a deeper level, it was informed by a populous policy agenda. CTU organizers seem to want to blur the line between the political and personal spheres because they genuinely believe that those lines are already blurred. In a very real way, Chicago's education policy influences the lives of hundreds of thousands of students, teachers, and staff. Increasing support staff in schools or increasing the salaries of teachers is about more than financial cost. It is about the standard of living of a huge portion of Chicagoans. It seems that CTU organizers are attempting to leverage the many people impacted by CTU politics in order to push forward an agenda that is supportive of them. This agenda often reads as urgent and deeply personal because many of the teachers, students, and staff who work in CPS may lack other substantial political opportunities. One possible explanation for the persistent political relevance of the CTU is that an increasing number of people find the CTU organizers' populous agenda compelling, an advantage that detractors may lack.

Antithetical to the CTU organizer strategy was the CTU detractor strategy, which, instead of personalizing the political conflict, tried to distract and detract from it. As described in previous sections, Mr. Stromberg believes that this strategy was born out of vulnerability. This

vulnerability may be based on a belief that the CTU, not anti-unionists, is fighting from a position of strength. In other words, the CTU is very popular, and CTU detractors are simply reacting to that popularity, as best as they know how, by distracting from it and attempting to depersonalize it. This political vulnerability helps explain why the CTU has remained politically relevant in the face of anti-unionism. The anti-unionism that they are facing may not be all that threatening.

Like CTU detractors, general union detractors tweet in a strategically depersonalized way; however, their depersonalization seems to be motivated by a fundamentally different point of view. The amount of historical and constitutional arguments embedded in their tweets points to a perspective that is genuinely philosophically opposed to unionism. General union detractors frequently drew connections between modern anti-union ideals and very old, well-respected ideas. Although this strategy may seem convincing, it is fundamentally flawed because it has repeatedly proven unsuccessful against teacher unions (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; New York Times Editorial Board, 1907; Schirmer, 2017). While organizations like the CTU constantly adjust their strategies to fit their political climate, general union detractors continue to repeat unsuccessful strategies. This is another possible explanation for the continued political relevance of the CTU.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

After spending the better part of a year studying the CTU, Mr. Stromberg is forced to consider what his conclusions, described in the previous chapter, imply about teacher unionism more broadly. This task is the most difficult of any that he has completed so far. All at once, Mr. Stromberg's study supported previous literature, revealed new things about the nature of the CTU's political strategy, and contradicted his assumptions about the organization. These complicated conditions challenged his ability to draw coherent conclusions about his data and connect those conclusions to broader political themes. However, using the lens of conflict theory, Mr. Stromberg was able to make connections that otherwise were obscured by the complexity of the data. He began to see the, oftentimes, coded ways that union detractors diminished the importance of the CTU and the ways that the CTU responded to those messages. It became increasingly clear how the competing financial interests of unionists and anti-unionists, described in chapter two, lead to conflicted social media relationships, which have implications beyond the confines of this study. After a lot of consideration, Mr. Stromberg realized that the CTU's response to anti-unionism via Twitter has implications for teacher organization, urban politics, and future research.

For the sake of clarity, this chapter is first broken into sections that correspond to the three Twitter categories described in the last chapter; (a) CTU organizers, (b) CTU detractors,

and (c) general union detractors, followed by a section on social media researchers. Each of these sections will describe what the conclusions Mr. Stromberg drew in chapter four have to say about teacher organization, urban politics, and research more broadly. Following these first four sections, he will describe his study's limitations, his recommendations for future research and conclude with a section describing the strategic implications of union and anti-union rhetoric reviewed for this study.

### **CTU Organizers**

Whereas previous literature indicated that unions have a rather limited scope, focused on salary and contract negotiations, Mr. Stromberg's findings indicate that the CTU is interested in a much broader set of policies. This became especially apparent when considering how the CTU, like other rank and file organizations, mobilized its supporters around identity and personal experiences (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Brenner, 2013). Comparing the CTU's success during the 2019 strike negotiations with its Twitter presence, it becomes clear that there is at least a correlation between the CTU's political success and its emphasis on identity, if not causation. CTU organizers utilized Twitter to promote their personal relationships to Chicago, their students, and their communities, all things that, according to discourse analysis theory, could legitimize their claims and blur the lines between their political and personal spheres (Gee, 2014). Supporters of the CTU went to board of education meetings, political rallies, and picket lines to support their teachers, in part, Mr. Stromberg argues, because the CTU's rhetoric encouraged and enabled them to do so through invitations and informative tweets. However, it was not just the existence of that support that was unique, but its nature. CTU organizers

successfully mobilized their followers to advocate for special education, nursing, and counseling staffing as well as a host of other issues that traditional unions never discuss.

If other teacher unions want to garner the same kind of success earned by the CTU, they too might utilize their stories and identities to draw supporters into their local conflicts. The findings from this study and previous literature indicate the magnetic potential of sharing those identities, especially through social media (Brickner, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). Additionally, teacher unions across the country might consider promoting bottom-up leadership and participation from non-professional political organizers. They might consider using identity and personal experience to blur the lines between the personal and political, but most of all, teacher unions may do well by following the lead of the CTU. This study has taught Mr. Stromberg that ordinary people can successfully conduct urban politics and that political elites stand an uncertain chance of victory when faced with thousands of political opponents working together.

### **CTU Detractors**

As defined by Mr. Stromberg's analysis in chapter four, CTU detractors are tweeters with a vested interest in disenfranchising the CTU because their goals directly conflict with that organization's goals. Like anti-unionists described in the literature, these accounts did not necessarily adhere to a single political strategy (Kirst, 2007) yet worked towards a common goal; to limit teacher union power (Shelton, 2017). These accounts belong to Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, CPS CEO Janice K. Jackson, and conservative political columnist John Kass. Maybe the most shocking realization Mr. Stromberg had while reviewing his data was that CTU detractors are not as powerful as they appear. Although the tweeters in this category occupy

influential positions in government and the media, those positions don't seem to offer much of an advantage against the CTU's 20,000 members and supporters. CTU detractors seem to be on the defense in many of their tweets, focusing on keeping the CTU at bay rather than meaningfully rolling back their power. For example, as described in chapter four, CTU detractors tweeted least frequently about politics instead using diversionary tactics, which may have drawn followers away from information about the 2019 strike. If anything, this study showed Mr. Stromberg that the CTU is more popular and influential than he first imagined, possibly due to their strategic use of identity and the personalization of politics described in the last section. This finding indicates a rather stark break from the way previous literature predicted conflict would play out. The traditional conflict theory narrative places ruling classes at a considerable advantage. They have the money, power, and opportunities to break strikes and force working classes into submission. Data from the 2019 strike, however, indicates a different scenario playing out in Chicago politics. The CTU seems to have successfully flipped the conflict theory script by amassing enough popular support to make CPS district administrators cautious about how they talk about the Union. In this case, the CTU, an analog for the working class, has the upper hand over Chicago's politics.

This realization changed Mr. Stromberg's perspective on both teacher organization and urban politics. Teacher organizers around the country may be operating from an instinctively defensive position because their adversaries hold powerful positions. However, this study has demonstrated their potential. Teacher unions hold strength in numbers, especially in large cities, that elected officials could not possibly dream of. The landscape of urban politics would be

totally different if teacher unions understood this power and used it to impact more than their salaries, as the CTU does. For example, as a part of their 2019 strike negotiations, the CTU successfully advocated for increased resources for homeless students. CPS is now required to provide at least one school community representative in every school with at least 75 students in temporary living situations (STLS). These representatives are responsible for building networks of support between schools and STLS by connecting them with additional resources both in and outside of school. This is just one example of a myriad of policies that may become possible through collective action. By harnessing their many supporters' collective strength, teacher unions could affect urban policy in essentially every way.

### **General Union Detractors**

As defined by Mr. Stromberg's analysis in chapter four, general union detractors are tweeters who are philosophically opposed to unions in general and, as described by previous literature, use anti-union litigation, anti-union rhetoric, or a combination of the two, to disenfranchise the organizations (Eisenberg-Guyot & Hagopian, 2018; Jha, Banerjee & Moller, 2020; Pierson, 2018; Teresa & Good, 2018; Weiner, 2013). Although they don't focus exclusively on the CTU, his findings indicate that general union detractors used Twitter as a tool to reach their anti-union goals. These accounts belong to the NRTW and conservative political columnist Kristen McQuerry. Similar to CTU detractors, general union detractors are not nearly as powerful as they seem. Organizations like the NRTW have had some critical successes recently, which include their recent Supreme Court victory in *Janus v. AFSCME*, but their stagnant rhetorical strategy may mean that those successes will become less and less frequent.

Previous literature shows that general union detractors have been using the same arguments for decades, that teacher unions are greedy, self-interested, and inherently oppressive organizations (Young, 2011; Kane & Newman, 2019). Literature suggests that union supporters often fire back with data that indicates the high teacher retention, decision-making power, salaries, and overall job satisfaction felt by teachers in unionized schools (Lovenheim, 2009; Roch & Sai, 2017; Vachon & Ma, 2015), however, those responses have been unsuccessful in halting maligning rhetoric. As a result, unions, like the CTU, have taken on new strategies to defend against anti-union rhetoric. The CTU's personalized rhetoric and subsequent success in its 2019 strike negotiations is a prime example of how those changes might be successful in the face of predictable rhetoric from general union detractors.

If more unions adopt a model of personalization demonstrated by the CTU, general union detractors may have to pivot their rhetorical strategy to curb unionists' power. Rather than relying on complicated legal jargon and constitutional arguments that may alienate potential supporters, general union detractors could follow their adversaries' lead and personalize their arguments. If anti-unionists continue to cling to old strategies, they may find that their opponents soon control larger and larger swaths of the political landscape.

### **Social Media Researchers**

The results of this study have critical implications for social media researchers, specifically that researchers would benefit from thoroughly understanding the identities of the people behind the accounts they study. This was Mr. Stromberg's first time conducting social media research of any kind. Mr. Stromberg is not an active social media user, nor did he have a

Twitter account prior to beginning this study. Needless to say, his experience did not prepare him for social media research. His lack of experience with the medium blinded Mr. Stromberg from the fact that all social media accounts, whether personal or associated with a large organization like the CTU, are authored by specific people with identities informing their online activity. There is no such thing as a faceless organization; some organizations just hide their faces.

As Mr. Stromberg conducted his research, it became extremely helpful to uncover the identities behind each of the accounts that he studied. In some cases, these identities were self-evident, as in Lori Lightfoot or Jesse Sharkey's accounts. In other cases, he had to do a little more digging. It was helpful, for example, to uncover that the CTU's official Twitter account is authored by a man with a long history of teacher activism in Chicago. Information like that helps Mr. Stromberg understand the motivation behind the account's activist perspective on Twitter and why it appeared so personally invested in the outcome of the 2019 strike. Social media researchers should be mindful of identities before beginning their research, especially if, as was evident in Mr. Stromberg's study, identity plays a central role in the period, events, or people being researched.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study that are important to discuss before drawing conclusions. Most of those limitations reflect the study's scope and, given further research, may be overcome. First, the study looked at tweets produced during a relatively limited timeframe: June 23rd, 2019 to November 30th, 2019. Consequently, readers should be wary about using Mr.

Stromberg's findings to draw conclusions about Twitter trends in general. It is possible that his findings reflect a precise historical moment and cannot be generalized.

The second limitation reflected by the study's scope is that Mr. Stromberg only collected data from ten accounts. He was careful to choose ten accounts that reflected a broad range of political ideologies and identities; however, ten accounts can still only say so much. There are thousands of CTU members alone, and many of those people have Twitter accounts. Drawing conclusions that apply to the CTU as a whole from his data will be premature before further research is conducted.

The third limitation reflected by the study's scope was the number of keywords Mr. Stromberg used to capture his data. He used seventeen keywords to capture 1,830 tweets from ten Twitter accounts. Although these tweets took a while for one person to analyze thoughtfully, they are by no means a complete picture of the CTU conflict. Prolific tweeters like Stacy Davis Gates produce over a thousand tweets a month. A thorough analysis of accounts like that could be studies all by themselves, so it would be unwise to assume that the 1,830 tweets Mr. Stromberg analyzed for this study captured all relevant data.

Lastly, Mr. Stromberg's personal bias is a limiting factor in this study, no matter how large the scope. His background as an educator and outsider in the CTU conflict has made him hyper-sensitive to political rhetoric, especially regarding CPS and the CTU. While this hyper-sensitivity may have helped him notice subtleties in the data, it may have also blinded him to some of the other non-political rhetorical strategies used by tweeters. To counteract this potential bias, Mr. Stromberg did his best to only code tweets with the politics task if they

directly referenced political policy, campaigns, or the 2019 strike. However, it would still be premature to draw conclusions from the data until many others conduct further research.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

After considering this study's limitations, Mr. Stromberg has two recommendations for future research, aiming to test his findings against broader conditions. First, he recommends conducting the study again with a much larger number of Twitter accounts. When he designed the study, he intentionally chose five pro-union and five anti-union accounts. Although he still believes that ratio is appropriate, Mr. Stromberg recommends doubling or tripling the number of accounts surveyed. Instead of five pro-union and five anti-union accounts, he would be interested in reading a study that reviewed ten or fifteen from each category. He would have greater confidence in his findings if they remained true with a broader data set.

Mr. Stromberg's second recommendation is to conduct a study that focuses on other historical events. The timeframe for his study was chosen because it centered on the 2019 CTU strike. There have been many other CTU conflicts before, and since that, Mr. Stromberg's study did not capture. For example, the debate over CPS' Covid-19 closures and reopening plans have been a constant source of conflict between CTU organizers and district administrators over the past year. Using discourse analysis to review Twitter data from this time would be a fascinating test of Mr. Stromberg's findings that he would be eager to read.

### **Conclusion**

CTU organizers harnessed the fear, anger, resentment, and hope of its supporters with great success in 2019. At the same time, anti-unionists stuck to their old political tools. They

stuck to consistently reasoned, economic, and legal arguments that ignored the emotions of their opponents. This strategy did not lead to success in 2019, and Mr. Stromberg predicts it will have even less effectiveness in the future. In the same way that all teacher unions may benefit by adopting the strategies used by the CTU in 2019, so might anti-unionists. Instead of ignoring the emotions of teacher unions, they may do well to take them seriously. They may benefit from seriously considering their opponents' experiences and responding in kind, with their own stories and feelings that blur the lines between their political and personal spheres.

I chose to use Twitter in this study because it accurately captured the political discourse of Chicago's 2019 teacher strike, but Twitter is not the only place where conversations about the future of public education are happening. Unionists and anti-unionists are having conversations about our political future in classrooms, in newspapers, and in board of education meetings, not to mention in congress, the Supreme Court, and the White House. The way that conversation happens will impact the future of our country. Will we be a country that respects our political adversaries' experiences or one that ignores those experiences? Mr. Stromberg does not have an answer to that question yet, but looking closely at the discourse of large political organizations like the CTU may help us get closer to an answer.

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## VITA

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