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CHILD LABOR

The Teens Who

BY KAREN COATES, VALERIA FERNÁNDEZ, AND REBECCA ZISSOU

Hundreds of thousands of kids nationwide work on farms, putting in long hours under dangerous conditions for incredibly low pay. And it’s all perfectly legal.
Feed America

Hundreds of thousands of kids nationwide work on farms, putting in long hours under dangerous conditions for incredibly low pay. And it’s all perfectly legal.
A few weeks before the end of the school year, Reyes*, then 15, got up at dawn. He packed a bag with clothes, boots, and a raincoat. Then he set out on a 3-day, 1,600-mile trip. He was traveling from his home in Edinburg, Texas, to Hart, Michigan.

It was a journey he had made every spring since he was 9. At first, he went with his family. Later, he went on his own. But Reyes was not traveling to see friends or visit relatives. He was going to Michigan to work on a farm. He did it to earn money to help his family survive.

While there, Reyes did everything from clearing the land to harvesting asparagus. Many days, it was very hot in the endless rows of crops. After just a few minutes, he was drenched in a thick layer of sweat and dirt. His fingers were constantly covered in blisters. He had rashes all over his legs. And his whole body ached.

But by the end of each summer, Reyes had earned a few thousand dollars. That was enough to help his family pay the bills and buy food, clothes, and other things they needed for the coming year.

“Everybody has to pitch in,” says Reyes, now 17.

Nationwide, an estimated 524,000 children and teens work on farms. They grow and harvest the fruits and vegetables Americans eat every day. Like Reyes, many of these young people are migrants. This means they move from one place to another to work. They are far from home and often miss days or even weeks of school. Some eventually drop out.

That makes it harder for them to find well-paying jobs when they are older.

Most shocking of all, say experts, is that it is perfectly legal for kids to labor on farms for hours at a time.

“We don’t allow a 12-year-old to work in an air-conditioned office,” says Reid Maki. He is the director of child labor advocacy at the National Consumers League. “Yet U.S. law allows that same 12-year-old to work 10 to 12 hours a day performing backbreaking work harvesting crops . . . in temperatures that are often in the 90s and even 100 degrees.”

**U.S. Child Labor Laws**

In many places around the world, kids have to work to earn money for their families (see sidebar, p. 9). In the U.S., child labor was widespread until the early 1900s. At the time, nearly 2 million kids younger than 15 were working long hours in dangerous conditions. Many worked in coal mines or garment factories or on farms. Poor families, especially immigrants, often depended on the extra income their children brought in to survive.

In response to calls to protect young workers, Congress passed the Fair

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**MIGRANT FARMWORKER** Someone who moves from one place to another to find work in agriculture. Many migrant farmworkers in the United States are immigrants and may or may not have permission from the U.S. government to be here. Others, like Reyes, were born in the U.S. and are American citizens. Nearly 20 percent of farmworkers in the U.S. are migrants.
Labor Standards Act in 1938. That federal law sets rules that govern the age at which young people can be employed. The rules also state what kinds of jobs they can do and how many hours they can work. Agricultural labor was left out of many of the rules. That was because family farming was widespread at the time, and parents often relied on their kids to help out. Those guidelines are still in effect today.

Currently, federal law says kids must be at least 16 to perform most nonfarm-related work. It also restricts kids under 16 to three hours of work on a school day.

But when it comes to farmwork, children as young as 12 are allowed to put in unlimited hours outside the school day. And for kids who work on their families’ farms, there is no minimum age at all. That is because authorities expect that their parents are looking out for them.

In the Fields, Out of School
For Reyes, working on farms has long been a way of life. He takes pride in being able to help his family.

Today, he is one of about 300,000 students across the country who migrate to follow the harvest (see map, p. 11). Many of them are the children of immigrants, like Reyes. Often, they are from poor families, and their parents lack the education or training to secure higher-paying jobs. As a result, these kids have to work to add to their parents’ income.

Some leave their homes in March or April and do not return until September or October. Along the way, they might go to different schools. Each time they move, they have to get used to new teachers and classmates. Plus, credits and coursework do not always transfer from one school to another. Some migrant students end up having to retake certain classes.

At the same time, many of them are simply too exhausted to concentrate on schoolwork. That is because they spend hours each day in the fields before and after class and on weekends. It can be hard for them to find time to study for tests or do homework. Some students skip school altogether or drop out, even though they are not supposed to.

Low-Paying Work
Despite young farmworkers’ contributions, many of their families continue to struggle financially. One reason is that federal law allows agricultural workers of all ages to be paid less than the national minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. Instead, they are often paid by how much they harvest, such as $16 for a crateful of onions or $3 for 72 bunches of kale.

Those rates are supposed to equal or exceed the minimum wage when you factor in the number of hours worked. But often that is not the case. So to earn as much as possible, multiple generations often labor side by side in the fields. This includes kids, parents, and grandparents. They share the workload and their earnings.
**A Dangerous Job**

Farmwork is also very hazardous. For one thing, workers can be exposed to pesticides for long periods of time. This can cause dizziness, nausea, brain damage, and certain types of cancer. In addition, some children are not given enough breaks or enough water to drink.

Many also work long hours. That deprives them of the sleep their growing bodies and minds need. Reyes, for example, would often start his day at 5 in the morning and not go to bed until midnight. “We wouldn’t have any time to sleep,” he says. “You feel exhausted.”

Some kids have to use sharp tools and dangerous machinery, such as chain saws, hay balers, or forklifts. The federal government categorizes such tasks as “hazardous.” For all other industries, the minimum age for performing this type of work is 18. For farmwork, however, it is 16. There are no age restrictions for kids who work on their families’ farms.

According to the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, about 33 children are hurt in agriculture-related accidents every day. And since 2009, more kids have been killed while working in agriculture than in all other industries combined.

**Protecting Young Workers**

Experts say that one of the most effective ways to keep young people from having to do dangerous work on farms would be to pay adult farmworkers higher wages. That way, families would be able to survive without their kids having to take such jobs. Young people could focus on school instead.

Critics of raising wages say that would mean higher prices at the grocery store. But prices likely would not be as high as people might expect, say experts. According to research from the University of California, Davis, Americans would each need to pay just $21 more a year for their fruits and vegetables to increase farmworkers’ wages by 40 percent.

“Companies keep trying to scare people: [They are saying] if we pay people a fair living wage, it’s going to skyrocket prices,” says Norma Flores López. She is from the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project, a group that helps migrant farmworkers and their families. “In reality, it’s not.”

Many people also say that federal laws are needed to protect young farmworkers. This past summer, U.S. Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard of California reintroduced a bill that would raise the minimum age for kids to be allowed to work on most farms to 14. The bill would also prevent them from working more than three hours on a school day, the same as for other industries.

In addition, experts say, it is important to raise awareness about how food is produced in the U.S. They point out that Americans have become increasingly concerned about animal welfare in the food industry. As a result, they have begun to eat less meat. Yet many people do not think twice about where their fruits and vegetables come from. That needs to change, say experts.

“You go and have your salad, but don’t realize someone’s breaking their back to harvest that,” says Juan Anciso. He is a professor at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.
Students on the Move

This map shows the number of migrant students in each state. The top five states are highlighted.

Map Skills

1. Which state has the most migrant students?
2. What are the main crops harvested there?
3. How many migrant students are in Texas?
4. How many migrant students are in your state?
5. What major crops are harvested in Oregon?
6. True or false: There are more migrant students in Kansas than Utah.
7. Which states in the Northeast have fewer than 1,000 migrant students?
8. Which state along the East Coast has the most migrant students?
9. In which direction did Reyes travel to get from Edinburg, Texas, to Hart, Michigan?
10. How many straight-line miles separate those towns?

“I Need to Help My Family”

Reyes, for one, is determined to finish high school. He wants to go to college. He is considering becoming an architectural engineer so he can build a better house for his parents.

But until then, he will continue to do whatever he can to earn money for his family. After all, the bathroom in their home recently started leaking.

Their car broke down. His little sister is quickly outgrowing her clothes.

“I’ve suffered a lot,” says Reyes. “But you know what: I need to help my family. If I don’t do it, who’s going to?”

Write About It! What factors might contribute to young people having to work on farms? Explain your answer, using facts from the article as supporting evidence.

Send us your essay for a chance to win a copy of the book Esperanza Rising! Go to junior.scholastic.com for details.

JUNIOR.SCHOLASTIC.COM
Why Everyone’s Talking About
THE PRIMARIES

State contests to choose the official Democratic and Republican presidential candidates start in February. Here’s what you need to know.

BY LAURA ANASTASIA

November’s Presidential Election may seem a long way off. But the race for the White House has been under way for months—and it is about to kick into high gear.

Starting February 3, the Republican and Democratic parties will hold state-by-state elections. The goal is to choose their official candidates for president. Those preliminary elections are called primaries and caucuses.

The Republican nominee for president is all but certain to be President Donald Trump. He is running for reelection as an incumbent. He has little opposition. But it is still anybody’s guess who the Democratic pick will be. When this issue went to press, more than a dozen Democrats were competing for their party’s official nomination.

How do the primaries work? How are the winners determined? And why should you care? Here is what you need to know about these early election contests.
1 What exactly are primaries and caucuses?

Primaries and caucuses are state elections that the two major political parties use to determine their candidates for president. The candidate for each party who gets the most votes in these contests almost always becomes that party’s nominee.

Primaries work much like a general election. On dates chosen by each state, voters cast secret ballots at public polling places. For a caucus, people gather in schools, churches, and other spots. They discuss their party’s candidates. Then they vote publicly or by secret ballot. (Only a few states hold caucuses.) This year’s primaries and caucuses will take place from February through June.

2 How does a candidate win his or her party’s official nomination?

For each primary or caucus that a candidate wins, he or she earns delegates. Delegates are political party members. They represent voters from their state at their party’s national convention. The Democratic convention will be in July. The Republican convention will be in August.

At each convention, delegates will vote based on the results of their state’s primary or caucus. A candidate needs a majority of delegate votes to win the nomination. But the nominees tend to be known before the conventions. That is because delegate counts are tracked as each state’s primary or caucus results come in.

3 What is expected to happen this time?

Trump is expected to win the nomination for the Republican Party. The Democratic race may not be as straightforward. Many candidates are seeking that nomination. No clear front-runner has emerged. Experts say that if there is no clear winner heading into the Democratic convention, more than one round of delegate voting may be needed to select the nominee.

4 Why are primaries and caucuses important?

These contests play a major role in deciding who will be the next U.S. president. That is one of the most powerful positions in the world.

Primaries and caucuses also give the American people a voice in deciding who the presidential candidates will be. People of all ages can push the issues they care about. They can support candidates who have promised to address those concerns. Americans can raise awareness on social media. They can donate money and help with campaign efforts.

Even votes for candidates who do not win their party’s nomination can have an impact. Presidential nominees sometimes adopt a rival’s policy ideas or promises that proved popular with voters during the primaries and caucuses.
As You Read, Think About:
What are the benefits and drawbacks of facial recognition technology?

Fans at a recent Taylor Swift concert in Los Angeles passed a screen playing videos of the pop star. They did not know that a camera hidden inside was snapping their photos. The images were reportedly analyzed by special software. The goal? To look for people considered possible threats to the singer.

That is just one example of how facial recognition technology is becoming more common in the United States. It is being used to increase security in many public places. Police departments are also using it to help find suspects (see sidebar, p. 16).

This worries some people. They say being scanned by facial recognition software without their knowledge violates their right to privacy, especially when it is used by law enforcement. The technology has also come under fire for being inaccurate.

Those concerns recently led cities in California and Massachusetts to ban its use by police. Other places are thinking of doing the same thing.

But some people say it is a mistake to ban the technology entirely. They argue that facial recognition can be a powerful tool for ensuring public safety—as long as its use is regulated.

In the end, Americans must decide how much privacy we are willing to give up to feel secure.

Scanning It All
Have you ever unlocked your phone just by looking at it? If so, you have used facial recognition software. It is also used at several U.S. airports to improve security screenings.

The technology is even starting to pop up in schools. Several schools around the U.S. reportedly use facial recognition systems to scan kids and adults. That includes schools in Missouri, Texas, and Oklahoma.

Officials say the technology is used to spot people who are not supposed to be at school.

A controversy erupted last year in Lockport, New York. The school district there planned to use a facial recognition system. But some parents and state lawmakers opposed the plan. They said the technology could endanger students’ privacy. Groups that work to protect Americans’ basic freedoms are also concerned about using the technology in schools.

Americans’ basic freedoms are known as civil liberties. The groups worry that kids will come to accept and expect that authorities will monitor everything they do.

Crime Fighter?
The debate over facial recognition gets even more heated when it comes to law enforcement using the technology. A 2016 study found that at least a quarter of state and local police departments are able to run facial recognition searches.

Many departments say the tech lets them track down suspects much faster than traditional methods do. How does that work? Typically, police upload an image of a suspect to a computer that has facial recognition software. (The photo could come from a store security camera or from a phone.) The software scans the image. Then it compares the image with ones in police databases. The databases include images of people who were previously arrested. Many states also let police use the software to compare a suspect’s image to driver’s license photos.

The technology can search through millions of images in seconds. Police say this saves them valuable time. Authorities say that in New York City alone, it led to nearly 1,000

ARE YOU BEING WATCHED?
Facial recognition technology can identify people’s faces—and may make Americans safer. But is it also threatening our privacy?

BY STEPH SMITH AND JOE BUBAR
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arrests last year. In other places, facial recognition software has helped police catch suspected jewel thieves. It has also helped them catch a mass shooter, among others.

**Flawed Technology?**
Yet facial recognition technology is far from perfect. For example, it has been shown to make significantly more mistakes when attempting to identify people of color and women.

Why? The people who developed facial recognition systems typically used photo databases that contained more images of white men than of women and people of color.

“People who created [the software] didn’t notice because they were mostly white men,” says Meredith Broussard. She is an artificial intelligence expert at New York University. Broussard says that the software’s shortcomings could lead to innocent people being misidentified and arrested.

**A Threat to Our Voices?**
The accuracy of facial recognition technology may improve. But some people would still have serious concerns about authorities using it. Groups that defend civil liberties say that police could use the technology to identify anyone who is out in public at any time, even if what a person is doing is legal. According to the 2016 study, some cities are moving to use systems that do that, including Chicago and Los Angeles. Those cities’ officials claim that the systems help them find crime suspects.

Being constantly monitored by the police poses a threat to our basic freedoms, civil liberties advocates claim. They say Americans may be less likely to engage in free speech if they know that they are being watched.

For example, the police could use facial recognition to identify protesters. That could make people afraid to openly object to government policies. (Speaking out in this way is a right protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.)

**Calls for Regulation**
Many Americans say police departments, companies, and schools must be more upfront about how they are using facial recognition. Some U.S. lawmakers have proposed bills to help regulate use of the technology. But none have yet become law. Even some major technology companies that develop facial recognition software worry that the industry is growing too quickly. And they worry it has too few rules to govern it.

Microsoft’s president, Brad Smith, wrote about that in 2018. “If we move too fast with facial recognition,” he wrote, “we may find that people’s fundamental rights are being broken.”

**Write About It!** Would you be in favor of facial recognition technology being used in your town or school? Write an essay that argues your point of view. Be sure to support your argument with reasons and evidence.

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**How Facial Recognition Works**

1. **CAPTURING**
   - A camera collects an image of a person’s face. Cameras may be mounted on buildings or in public places.

2. **EXTRACTING**
   - Software identifies facial features in the image, then creates a unique facial profile for that individual.

3. **COMPARING**
   - The facial profile is compared with millions of existing profiles stored in a database.

4. **MATCHING**
   - If the software finds a likely match, it flags the image. The person may have been identified.
Civil War

SPYING ON THE SOUTH

During the Civil War, a young black woman born into slavery helped the Union defeat the Confederate South—and end enslavement in America.

BY TONYA BOLDEN
Mary Richards’s heart was pounding. She raised her fist to rap on the door of the mansion. For several seconds, everything was silent. Then the door began to creak open. Her next mission was about to begin.

Throughout the Civil War (1861-65), Richards had been spying on the enemy: the Southern Confederacy. Helping the Union Army was dangerous anywhere in the South. But it was especially so in Richmond, Virginia. That was the Confederate capital. It also was where Richards lived. Now, in August 1864, she was about to enter a very dangerous place, the White House of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Spying for the North was especially meaningful for Richards. She was black and had been born enslaved in Richmond. The 24-year-old would do anything she could to help the Union forces win the war.

Getting into the enemy’s headquarters was going to be tricky. When the door to the house opened, she pretended to be a washerwoman. She asked if the household had any laundry. After being told to wait, Richards found herself in a room that appeared to be Davis’s study. Quickly, she began to search the drawers of a cabinet. She hoped to find information that might help the Union Army.

Could there be Confederate battle plans? A map showing troop movements? People said Richards had a photographic memory. So she could carry away many details of anything that she saw.

Suddenly, someone entered the room. It was a tall, thin man. He was blind in one eye. Richards froze. It was Jefferson Davis himself.

Richards had been born enslaved. She would do anything to help the Union win. "Who are you? What do you want?" he barked at her sternly.

Richards swallowed hard. But she had a trick up her sleeve. She knew white people like Davis wrongly believed black people were too stupid to be spies. So she played dumb. She mumbled as if she had lost her way. She backed out of the room. Then she backed out of the house altogether, to safety. She had survived another day as part of a spy ring that would soon help the Union win the Civil War.

Richards was considered a nobody. She was invisible in the eyes of most white people. But this young black woman played a crucial role in one of the great struggles of American history.

Born Into Slavery

Little is known about Richards’s beginnings. She was born about 1841, into slavery. From a young age, she was enslaved by a wealthy Richmond merchant.

He died in 1843. Richards was left to his widow and their grown daughter, Elizabeth Van Lew. The women hated slavery. They may have tried to free the child. But according to Virginia law, anyone they freed would have to leave the state, says historian Elizabeth Varon. The Van Lews might have freed Richards secretly so the girl could still live with them, Varon believes.

Richards was an exceptionally bright child. She was very special to Elizabeth Van Lew. Van Lew had Richards baptized in a white church. She later sent the girl north to be educated. This was extremely rare for a black child in the South.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

**THE CIVIL WAR** The bloodiest conflict on American soil erupted in 1861 when 11 Southern states, called the Confederacy, attempted to secede from the rest of the United States, or the Union. The war devastated the young nation. By the time of the Confederacy’s defeat in 1865, the war had taken more than 750,000 lives, about 2 percent of the U.S. population.
In 1855, Van Lew arranged for the 14-year-old to travel as a missionary to the African nation of Liberia. But Richards was unhappy there. In 1859, Van Lew brought her home.

When Richards returned, tensions over slavery in the United States had reached a fever pitch. The country was about to come apart in the Civil War.

**The War Over Slavery**

Slavery had once been common throughout the country. But by 1804, states in the North had all passed laws to end it. Some, however, did so only gradually. States in the South became concerned that slavery might be abolished in the U.S. Their economies relied on the labor of enslaved people to grow cotton. That was the South’s most important crop.

Over time, the issue became increasingly heated. In the South, some people began to call for states that allowed slavery to secede, or break off, from the Union. Between November 1860 and February 1861, seven states did so. They formed their own nation: the Confederate States of America. Many Virginians favored joining the growing rebellion.

On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces fired on the Union-held Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. When the people of Richmond heard the news, they celebrated in the streets. War had come.

Within days, Virginia joined the Confederacy. Three more states followed by June. That made a total of 11. In the Van Lew household, each day’s news was received with dread.

**The Fight in Richmond**

From the start, Richmond was at the center of the war. Northerners thought that if they could capture the Confederate capital, the conflict could be over quickly. By mid-1862, the Union Army had pushed nearly to the outskirts of the city. This sent Richmond’s people into a panic.

But Southern troops under General Robert E. Lee rallied to defend their capital. There was a series of clashes in June. Lee’s troops pushed the Northern troops back nearly to the Union’s capital in Washington, D.C. Richmond was soon flooded with thousands of Union soldiers who had been taken prisoner. The city was overwhelmed. It turned old warehouses into makeshift prisons to hold them.

Van Lew was a secret Union sympathizer. She bribed Confederate officials so that she could deliver food and medicine to the prisoners. She even helped some prisoners escape. She hid them in her attic, then sped them on their way north.

At the same time, Van Lew began putting together a well-organized spying ring to aid the Union. No one would prove more important to this secret society than Mary Richards.

**Richards in the Spy Ring**

Spying was essential to the efforts of both the Union and the Confederacy during the Civil War. In the South, black people were especially valuable in gathering intelligence for the Union. White officials and
Richards was everywhere, taking coded messages to and from members of the spy ring. They used code names. And they carried secret messages to Union commanders on nearby battlefields. Some of the messages were written in invisible ink and hidden in their clothing.

Richards was everywhere. She took coded messages to and from Van Lew and members of the spy ring. Other times, her mission was to uncover fresh intelligence. Time and again, she delivered the goods. “When I open my eyes in the morning, I say to the servant, ‘What news, Mary?’” Van Lew wrote in her diary. Richards “never fails,” Van Lew noted.

The End of the War

General Ulysses S. Grant was the Union Army’s top commander. By the summer of 1864, he had laid siege to the town of Petersburg. That was only 25 miles from Richmond. Union troops had also cut off supplies to Richmond. How long could Confederate forces defend it?

The spy ring scoured the city for information about Confederate plans to give to the Union commanders. Richards did her part. She even managed to slip into the chambers of the Confederate Senate. She hid in a closet and listened in on a secret session. Later, in nearby Fredericksburg, Richards gave Union forces the information they needed to capture two Confederate officers.

KEY MOMENTS

The Civil War

1861
Fort Sumter
Months after South Carolina seceded from the U.S., Union troops continue to hold this fort in Charleston. Then in April 1861, Confederate troops take the fort by force. The Civil War has begun.

1863
Gettysburg
After key early victories, Confederate forces attempt an invasion of the North. But in July 1863, Union troops win a decisive battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It proves to be the turning point of the war.

1865
Lee Surrenders
On April 9, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrenders his army to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. After four years, the Civil War is effectively over.
On April 2, 1865, Grant’s Union troops pushed through the Confederate lines at Petersburg. Lee’s Confederate Army abandoned Richmond. Soon afterward, Northern troops marched triumphantly through the streets. “Richmond at last!” one white woman heard a black Union soldier shout, much to her horror.

A week later, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House, near Richmond. The Civil War was all but over. The following December, slavery was finally abolished by the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

**Life After Wartime**

After the war, the U.S. government showed its appreciation to Van Lew. “You have sent me the most valuable information received from Richmond during the war,” Grant wrote to her. But still largely unknown to him were the scores of people, many of them enslaved, who had risked death to serve as the eyes and ears of the Richmond spy ring. They have remained unknown to generations of Americans since.

The people who risked their lives included Mary Richards. After the war, she was legally free. She left Van Lew’s house to strike out on her own. Since the fall of Richmond, she had been teaching black people there. Later that year, she traveled to New York City. There, she gave lectures on her adventures as a Union spy.

Her audiences were spellbound. According to one account, “She urged the educated young men and women to go South.” She urged them to set up schools to help formerly enslaved people on the “road to freedom.” Slavery was over. But there was much work to be done to bring justice to black people, she said.

Richards practiced what she preached. In 1867, she ran a school in Georgia for the Freedmen’s Bureau. That agency was created by Congress to help poor Southerners, black and white, who were devastated by the war. But the school was faced with a lack of funds and with anger from local white people. It had to close after several months.

**The Most Fabled Spy**

Soon after, the details of Richards’s life become a mystery. At times, it is even difficult to know which name to use for her. Many historians call her Mary Bowser. That name is from a brief period in which she was married. But Richards used many other names for herself through the years.

Why? For one thing, Richards had used many different names in her years as a spy. Also, growing up as a black person in the South, she may have learned early in life that it was safer to hide her true self and put on an act in front of white people. Always hiding in plain sight.

Mary Richards was “the most fabled—and most elusive” of the Richmond spies, writes Varon. Even in her mystery, she made history.

**Write About It!** What risks did Mary Richards face as a spy during the Civil War? Include examples from the article to support your ideas.

Tonya Bolden is the author of more than 40 books. Her most recent is the historical novel *Saving Savannah.*