Ms. Wiemokly U.S. History I

**The Experiences of Female Factory Workers**

**During the Industrial Revolution**

**Primary Source Analysis**

As you view each set of primary sources, answer the related questions on a separate piece of paper.

**Two Women Weavers, 1860 (Merrimack Valley Textile Museum)**

1) What does this image tell you about the women who worked in the mills? Why is the date that this picture was taken significant? What does knowing the date add to our knowledge about the women in it?

2) Compare this image to the drawing of a mill girl from the cover of the *Lowell Offering*. What are the differences and similarities between the drawing and the photo?

3) What is the significance of the setting of this photograph? After looking at the two images together, would you have expected this image to have the factory in it as well? Why might it not be?

4) What are the differences between ways we look at photographs and the ways we look at drawings? Are they really the same sort of a document? Are there parallels between the ways we look at one and the other?

**"Drawing In," an illustration from A History of Wonderful Inventions (New York: Harper, n.d.) (Merrimack Valley Textile Museum)**

1) What sort of a machine is this, and how is it presented in the drawing? Do you imagine that this is a factual representation of the spaces in which mill girls worked?

2) Look at the clothing, hairstyle, and posture of the woman working at the weaving machine. What is meant to be conveyed by these characteristics? What sort of a woman are we to believe the worker is? Compare this image to the Tintype of Two Woman Weavers taken in 1860. To what might you attribute any differences or similarities between the two images?

3) Imagine what the sounds of this machine might have been. How would working conditions in this situation have compared with what these young women would have been accustomed to before coming to the mills?

**Time Table of the Lowell Mills (Merrimack Valley Textile Museum)**

1) Using this simple artifact, what can you learn about the everyday lives of mill workers?

2) What does the bell schedule tell you? Why did the bell schedule change seasonally?

3) What is the effective date of the schedule? Why might this be significant?

4) Compare this to the work schedule of non-mill workers. Would it have been similar or different? What would explain these differences or similarities?

**Title Page of the *Lowell Offering*, 1840 (Merrimack Valley Textile Museum)**

1) Who wrote for the *Lowell Offering*? Why was this significant?

2) What sort of articles were included in the magazine? How many of them emphasize categories of the Cult of True Womanhood? How many show a "liberty rhetoric" predisposition?

3) Judging by the titles of articles, was "old maidhood" a concern among the Lowell mill girls?

**"Song of the Spinners" from the *Lowell Offering*, 1841 (Merrimack Valley Textile Museum)**

1) What do the lyrics of this song tell you about the values of the workers who sang it?

2) What do the lyrics tell you about the singers' attitudes about their work?

3) How do the lyrics use the word "dependent" here?

4) What is the "idle throng" the words refer to? What is the attitude toward it represented in the lyrics?

**1834 *Boston Transcript* reports on the Strike**

1) According to the *Boston Transcript* report, why had the workers gone out on strike?

2) What form of activity had their protest taken? Was it like strikes among predominantly male workers during the same period, or was it distinctive?

3) Why was their behavior, as the *Boston Transcript* stated it, "not altogether to the credit of Yankee girls"? What is the significance of calling them "Yankee"?

4) Who was Mary Wollstonecraft, and why would the strikers sound like her to the reporter?

**Poem that Concluded Lowell Women Workers' 1834 Petition to the Manufacturers**

1) What sort of language is used in this poem? Is it the sort of language one might expect of a mill worker? Is it the tone of a weak person speaking to a stronger one? Why are certain words capitalized? Is there a consistent pattern at work here?

2) Why did the mill workers end their strike petition with a poem? What would the use of a poem show the mill owners about the workers as women?

3) What does this poem assume about those who will be reading the petition? Is it a concrete demand, or is it a demand in principle?

4) What is the usual meaning of the term "Tories" in American history? Would the term have a different meaning in 1834 than it did in 1776, and why might it? What was the value of associating their strike demands with "the flag of Independence"? Might independence have a new and particular meaning to these mill workers in 1834 that it might not have had in 1776? Compare here, for example, the "Song of the Spinners" and its use of the term "dependent." 4) The mill workers also argued that they were "the daughters of free men." What exactly would this mean in 1834? Compare the 1836 song the mill strikers sang, with the lines, "I cannot be a slave, I will not be a slave," with this statement.

**1836 Song Lyrics Sung by Protesting Workers at Lowell**

1) How does this song reflect the debate over the comparisons between the lives of free workers in the North and slaves in the South?

2) How do the women strikers use the term "slave" in these lyrics? How would their audience--people in Lowell, Massachusetts and in the rest of the North--respond to this use of the term?

3) How do the women strikers use the term "liberty" here? What would the meaning of this be to the song's audience?

4) At the end of this strike, native-born Yankee middle-class "daughters of free men" were replaced with immigrant women workers, mostly from Ireland. What did this action on the part of the mill managers say about the power of liberty rhetoric in the 1834 and 1836 strikes?

**Boott Cotton Mill Regulations**

1. Explain in your own words, three regulations described in the document.
2. What is every worker required to do on Sundays?
3. If a millworker was sick, how would she go about “calling out of work”? Explain the risk of doing so.
4. Do these regulations seem reasonable to you? Why or why not?

**Series of Bennett Letters**

1. What is the relationship between the authors of the letters and who they are writing to?
2. Why do you think Melinda M. Edwards left her home to work in the mills?
3. Has Melinda had a positive experience working in the mills so far?
4. Based on the letters, what do you think the social views were of people who worked in factories? Was factory life seen as an elite job in society?

**Letter Written To A Boston Newspaper By A Lowell Factory Girl**

1. What is the purpose of this letter to the newspaper? What is it trying to convey?
2. Do you think this is an honest and accurate experience of mill girls? Why or why not?
3. On a regular basis, female workers were consistently paid less than male workers. Based on the wage payments and daily work hours in the article, what could you infer about the lifestyle of mill girls?