

The most people in  
the 1830s worked



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Industrial Revolution was dawning in the United States. At Lowell, Massachusetts, the construction of a big cotton mill began in 1821. It was the first of several that would be built there in the next 10 years. The machinery to spin and weave cotton into cloth would be driven by water power.

All that the factory owners needed was a dependable supply of labor to tend the machines. As most jobs in cotton factories required neither great strength nor special skills, the owners thought women could do the work as well as or better than men. In addition, they were more compliant. The New England region was home to many young, single farm girls who might be recruited. But would stern New England farmers allow their daughters to work in factories? The great majority of them would not. They believed that sooner or later factory workers would be exploited and would sink into hopeless poverty. Economic “ laws” would force them to work harder and harder for less and less pay.

THE LOWELL EXPERIMENT How, then, were the factory owners able to recruit farm girls as laborers? They did it by building decent houses in which the girls could live. These houses were supervised by older women who made sure that the girls lived by strict moral standards. The girls were encouraged to go to church, to read, to write and to attend lectures. They saved part of their earnings to help their families at home or to use when they got married. The young factory workers did not earn high wages; the average pay was about \$3. 50 a week. But in those times, a half-dozen eggs cost five cents and a whole chicken cost 15 cents.

The hours worked in the factories were long. Generally, the girls worked 11 to 13 hours a day, six days a week. But most people in the 1830s worked from dawn until dusk, and farm girls were used to getting up early and working until bedtime at nine o'clock. The factory owners at Lowell believed that machines would bring progress as well as profit. Workers and capitalists would both benefit from the wealth created by mass production. For a while, the factory system at Lowell worked very well. The population of the town grew from 200 in 1820 to 30, 000 in 1845. But conditions in Lowell's factories had already started to change.

Faced with growing competition, factory owners began to decrease wages in order to lower the cost-and the price-of finished products. They increased the number of machines that each girl had to operate. In addition, they began to overcrowd the houses in which the girls lived. Sometimes eight girls had to share one room. In 1836, 1, 500 factory girls went on strike to protest wage cuts. (The girls called their action a "turn out.

") But it was useless. Desperately poor immigrants were beginning to arrive in the United States from Europe. To earn a living, they were willing to accept low wages and poor working conditions. Before long, immigrant women replaced the "Yankee" (American) farm girls. To many people, it was apparent that justice for wage earners would not come easily. Labor in America faced a long, uphill struggle to win fair treatment.

In that struggle, more and more workers would turn to labor unions to help their cause. They would endure violence, cruelty and bitter defeats. But eventually they would achieve a standard of living unknown to workers at

any other time in history. GROWTH OF THE FACTORY In colonial America, most manufacturing was done by hand in the home. Some was done in workshops attached to the home.

As towns grew into cities, the demand for manufactured goods increased. Some workshop owners began hiring helpers to increase production. Relations between the employer and helper were generally harmonious. They worked side by side, had the same interests and held similar political views.

The factory system that began around 1800 brought great changes. The employer no longer worked beside his employees. He became an executive and a merchant who rarely saw his workers. He was concerned less with their welfare than with the cost of their labor.

Many workers were angry