

STATION A: CHILD LABOR

During the Industrial Revolution, poor children often worked full time jobs in order to help support their families. Children as young as four years old worked long hours in factories under dangerous conditions. The practice of child labor continued throughout much of the Industrial Revolution until laws were eventually passed that made child labor illegal.

What types of jobs did children do? Children performed all sorts of jobs including working on machines in factories, selling newspapers on street corners, breaking up coal at the coal mines, and as chimney sweeps. Sometimes children were preferred to adults because they were small and could easily fit between machines and into small spaces.

Did they make a lot of money? Another reason that businesses liked to hire children workers was because they worked for little pay. In many cases, children weren't paid at all, but worked for their room and board. When they did earn wages, children often earned 10 to 20 percent of what an adult would earn for the same job.



Group of Breaker boys by Lewis Hine

Why did they hire children? Some businesses hired children because they were cheap, worked hard, and could do some jobs that adults couldn't do. In some cases, the businesses treated the children no better than slaves. They kept them locked up and forced them to work long hours. In other cases, the businesses felt they were helping the children out by feeding them and keeping them from starving.

Long Hours and Dangerous Work: The Industrial Revolution was a time of few government regulations on working conditions and hours. Children often had to work under very dangerous conditions. They lost limbs or fingers working on high powered machinery with little training. They worked in mines with bad ventilation and developed lung diseases. Sometimes they worked around dangerous chemicals where they became sick from the fumes.

Did a lot of children work? Child labor was a common practice throughout much of the Industrial Revolution. Estimates show that over 50% of the workers in some British factories in the early 1800s were under the age of 14. In the United States, there were over 750,000 children under the age of 15 working in 1870.

Putting an End to Child Labor: In the United States, a real effort to regulate and put an end to child labor began in the early 1900s. Many businesses were against it because they liked the cheap labor. Some families also needed the money their kids brought home. However, eventually laws were passed. In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed that placed some limitations on child labor, set a minimum wage, and put limits on how many hours an employee should work.

Interesting Facts about Child Labor during the Industrial Revolution

- Children who worked often received little or no education.
- Britain passed one of the first child labor laws in 1833. It made it illegal for children under the age of 9 to work.
- Sometimes children workers were orphans who had little choice but to work for food.
- Children in the coal mines often worked from 4 am until 5 pm. Some child workers worked all day pulling wagons of coal up small tunnels just a few feet tall.
- Many young girls worked in match factories. The harsh chemicals would often cause them lose their teeth.

STATION B: LABOR UNIONS

Labor unions are large groups of workers, usually in a similar trade or profession, that join together to protect the workers' rights. The Industrial Revolution was a time when national labor unions began to form in the United States.

Why did labor unions first form? During the Industrial Revolution, the working conditions in factories, mills, and mines were terrible. Unlike today, the government took little interest in creating safety standards or in regulating how businesses treated workers. The typical industrial employee worked long hours under dangerous conditions for little pay. Many workers were poor immigrants who had little choice but to keep working despite the conditions. If an employee complained, they were fired and replaced. At some point, workers began to revolt. They joined together and created unions in order to fight for safer conditions, better hours, and increased wages. It was easy for factory owners to replace one employee who complained, but much more difficult to replace all their employees if they went on strike together.

What did they do to make things better? The unions organized strikes and negotiated with employers for better working conditions and pay. During the Industrial Revolution, this wasn't always a peaceful process. When employers tried to replace striking workers, the workers sometimes fought back. In some cases, things became so violent that the government had to step in and restore order.

The First Unions: In the early part of the Industrial Revolution most of the unions were smaller and local to a town or a state. After the Civil War, national unions began to form. One of the first national unions was the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. It grew rapidly, but just as quickly collapsed. The next major union to form was the American Federation of Labor (sometimes called the AFL). The AFL was founded in 1886 by Samuel Gompers. It became a powerful force in fighting for workers' rights through strikes and through politics.

Major Strikes: There were several major strikes that took place during the Industrial Revolution. One of them was the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. It began in Martinsburg, West Virginia after the B&O Railroad company cut wages for the third time in a year. The strike quickly spread throughout the country. When strikers tried to stop the trains from running, federal troops were sent in to put down the strike. Things turned violent and several strikers were killed. The strike ended 45 days after it started. Although the wages weren't restored, workers began to see the power they had through the strike. Other famous strikes included the Homestead Steel Mill Strike of 1892 and the Pullman Strike of 1894. Many of these strikes ended in violence and the destruction of property, but eventually they began to have an impact on the workplace and conditions gradually improved.



The Great Railroad Strike of 1877
Source: *Harper's Weekly*

Labor Unions Today: Throughout the 1900s, labor unions became a powerful force in the economy and politics. Today, labor unions aren't as strong as they once were, however, they still play an important role in many industries. Some of the largest unions today include the National Education Association (teachers), the Service Employees International Union, and the Teamsters.

Interesting Facts about Labor Unions during the Industrial Revolution

- In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act was passed that guaranteed the right for private citizens to form a union.
- Business owners would sometimes put spies in the unions and then fire any workers that tried to join.
- One of the earliest strikes was held by the Lowell Mill Girls in 1836. At the time, they called the strike a "turn out."
- A strike in Chicago in 1886 turned into a riot later called the Haymarket Riot. Four of the strikers were hanged after being found guilty for starting a riot.
- In 1947, the Taft-Hartley Act was passed to restrict the power of labor unions.

STATION C: WOMEN DURING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Industrial Revolution was a major turning point in history and changed the way of life for everyone. One major change was a shift in the roles of women. For the first time, a large number of women began to work jobs outside of the home. This newfound independence gave rise to other changes including the women's rights movement.



Women Mill Workers
(1910) by Lewis Wickes Hine

Lowell Mill Girls: One of the first factories in the United States to begin hiring women was the textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts. By the 1840s, around seventy-five percent of the workforce at Lowell mills were women. These women became known as "Mill Girls" or "Lowell Girls."

Getting Away from the Farm: Most of the "Mill Girls" were the daughters of farmers in the northeast. They took the opportunity to get away from the farm and make some money of their own. Sometimes girls took the jobs to help out their family or to save money for a future family. The women lived in large boarding houses with hundreds of other women. There were lots of rules that the girls had to live by. They typically shared a room with several other women, had to attend church on Sundays, and no men were allowed in the boarding houses.

Lower Wages and Poor Working Conditions: One reason that the factory owners liked to hire women was because they could pay them less. At the time, women made around half of what men made for doing the same job. It may sound strange now, but back then people thought that men should make more money because they provided for the family, while the money women made was considered "extra" money. A Young Girl Working by Lewis Wickes Hine Working conditions in the factories were not great. The women worked long hours from early morning to late at night. They often worked over 70 hours a week. The factory rooms were crowded and very loud. Although the women did much of the work, the supervisors were generally all men.

Civil War: The Civil War took place during the latter part of the Industrial Revolution. With so many men gone to war or killed in battle, new jobs were opened up to women and even more women entered the work force.

Other Jobs: Besides working in textile factories, women began to work all sorts of jobs including jobs as teachers, office clerks, nurses, and seamstresses.

Women's Rights Movement: As women began to work together in large groups, they gained a sense of community. They joined the labor movement to improve working conditions and fought for the abolition of slavery. They also began to fight for women's rights. Leaders such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed groups to push for women's right to vote during the Industrial Revolution. It took a long time and lot of work, but women finally gained the right to vote when the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920.

Interesting Facts about Women During the Industrial Revolution

- The Lowell women had their own monthly publication where they contributed articles, poems, and stories.
- Dorothea Dix recruited thousands of women to become nurses during the Civil War.
- The first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848.
- When the Lowell factory tried to raise the rent at the boarding houses in 1836, the Lowell women went on strike. The factory eventually gave in and lowered the rent. Typical wages in the mid-1800s for a woman working at a mill was between \$3.00 and \$3.50 a week.