

## **The Industrial Revolution in the United States: Historiography and Methods**

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In my first essay, I examined the industrial revolution in the United States with particular focus on the place of women workers in the early phase of that transformation. You'll recall that I emphasized the novel demands that cotton textile factories made on women from rural farming families and the ways that working women drew upon republican traditions and evangelical religious ideas in shaping their protests of aspects of early industrial capitalism that seemed oppressive. In this essay, I will place my discussion within a broader historiographical framework by talking about the work of English and American historians that has defined the historical debates concerning the industrial revolution and thus shaped my own research in this field. With the terrain established for historians' debates about industrialization, I will then talk about the methods that I have employed over the years in my research on early working women in nineteenth-century New England. In your work with students in American History you are not likely to draw directly on historiography and methods, but you should find that today's discussion provides a firmer foundation for drawing on the primary sources and websites that should prove to be valuable resources in your teaching.

The industrial revolution began in Britain and so, too, did the historiography on which a generation of American historians has relied. The pivotal work in the English canon was E.P. Thompson's classic study, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Published in 1963, that work explored a transformative period, roughly 1790 to 1830, in

which changing social relations of production and productive technology placed novel demands on English working people.<sup>i</sup> Thompson explored the traditions that workers brought with them into a period of intense economic, social, and political ferment. He explored the working class groups that emerged in these decades, the issues that mobilized them, and the competing sets of ideas that clashed in this formative period. He showed how the repressive politics of the Napoleonic period forced working-class organizing underground, contributing to the rise of a working-class radicalism that challenged both industrial capitalism and the state. Thompson traced artisanal radicalism both as a reaction to changing industrial conditions that workers found oppressive and to the state apparatus of political repression that sought to deny working people a voice in the larger society. His work is an exploration of both changing class relations and conflicting sets of ideas as English society was transformed by the changes of the early industrial revolution.

Thompson's study stirred American labor historians, reminding them of how little of this perspective was evident in historical accounts of industrialization in the United States. In the late 1960s approaches associated with the work of John R. Commons and his students still dominated the historiographical landscape.<sup>ii</sup> Work in American labor history tended to reflect an institutional focus with an emphasis on working-class organizations and the place of organized workers in American politics. For the nineteenth century this perspective focused on journeymen's efforts to organize their trades and necessarily meant a focus on native-born, white, skilled workingmen to the almost total exclusion of immigrant, African-American, and women workers. Thus there were studies of the court cases that had eventually legalized efforts to organize trade

unions, case studies of individual skilled crafts and craft unions, studies of skilled workers' efforts to shorten the working day, and studies of the ideology of the early craft union movement that culminated in the emergence of the American Federation of Labor at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>iii</sup> It was a relatively narrow canvas upon which to paint the history of the American working class. Much of the lives and concerns of working people was absent from this framework and only a tiny proportion of working people could be found in this literature. It was within this context that a great many young American historians just getting launched in the profession in the late 1960s and early 1970s found the new English labor history of Thompson and others so engaging. Just at a time when African Americans were demanding inclusion in the nation's political process and the its history and women were addressing their own subordination in economic and public life, the work of English labor historians pointed the way to new, more democratic approach to labor history in particular and United States history more generally. It was in this context that I began my graduate training in American History in 1970 and these developments pointed me toward new approaches in the study of the industrial revolution in nineteenth-century New England.

Herbert Gutman, Bruce Laurie, Paul Faler, Alan Dawley, and David Montgomery—to name only a few of those who have built upon the work of English labor historians to reconceive our understanding of this period—have explored in detail the impact of the industrial revolution on artisans and factory workers, and on native born and immigrants. Their writings have enriched our appreciation of the revolutionary character of developments over the course of the nineteenth century and clarified the specific story that emerged in the United States.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite this outpouring of scholarship, one is left with a strong sense that the industrial revolution is primarily a men's story. The transformation of artisan crafts, the growth of railroads, the emergence of iron and steel, and later of mass-production industries--these are developments that primarily affected men's work. Although women workers were drawn in large numbers into the first factories in the United States—into the textile mills and early shoe factories of New England, for instance—one finds their stories at the margins of many of the studies that examine the nineteenth-century industrial revolution in the United States. Thus Paul Faler's and Alan Dawley's accounts of Lynn shoemakers are, in fact, studies of male shoemakers. Bruce Laurie's *Working People of Philadelphia* begins with a disclaimer that the thinness of the historical record prevented him from systematically including accounts of women and African Americans in his story of that city's working people. The underlying conceptual framework of David Montgomery's fine study draws primarily on the shop-floor experiences of skilled male workers. Working women find places in all these studies, but they are at the margins of the analysis. Their experiences are apparently not central to an understanding of the industrial revolution in the United States; nor do we learn a great deal about women's experiences or attitudes in the course of these momentous changes.

In this early literature on the industrial revolution in the United States, there was one signal exception to the general exclusion of women's experience in the larger story. Herbert Gutman published a pathbreaking article, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," that took a broad Thompsonian view of the industrial revolution as it affected both Yankee women workers in the early mills and immigrant recruits to urban, industrial centers two generations later. His basic argument

in that article is the existence of “a recurrent tension...between native and immigrant men and women fresh to the factory and the demands imposed upon them by the regularities and disciplines of factory labor. That state of tension,” in Gutman’s view, “was regularly revitalized by the migration of diverse premodern native and foreign peoples into an industrializing or a fully industrialized society.”<sup>v</sup> It is an argument that at once builds on Thompson’s view of the English industrial revolution and yet demonstrates how successive waves of immigration made the cultural experience of industrialization quite different in the United States.

In looking at three distinct time periods in the century between 1815 and 1919, Gutman stresses the commonality of workers’ responses over time to the novel demands of advancing industrial capitalism. In his treatment of Yankee mill women, the unique influence on their response was the fact that they were working only temporarily in the mills, giving them a short-term perspective that in Gutman’s view undermined a more collective response to declining wages and conditions of work. Still, Gutman finds much in common in terms of conflict between labor and capital in Lowell in the 1830s and in steel mills some eighty years later. There is nothing in his analysis that raises the idea that millworkers’ gender may have been an influence on their class response to millowners’ demands. The breadth of Gutman’s vision is at the same time a limitation in his work. As in Thompson’s analysis, there is not much place for gender in his conceptual framework.<sup>vi</sup>

The resurgence of interest in American labor anticipated by some years the emergence of U.S. women’s history as an innovative field in American History. The appearance of a renewed feminist movement beginning in the late 1960s and its influence

on the academy contributed to the newfound interest in writing women into mainstream narratives of American History.<sup>vii</sup> This work was bound to shape the revisionist impulse in the field of labor history and soon both gender and class were becoming central concepts in new scholarship. This development gave a new complexity to explorations of the industrial revolution in the United States. No longer did historians need to rely on a “one size fits all” approach, but men and women’s distinct responses became worthy subjects of analysis. Moreover, historians began to explore not only differences between men and women, but also gender conflicts that reflected those differences. My own research on Lowell mill women and studies by Mary H. Blewett of New England shoemaking and Christine Stansell on New York City advanced a gendered approach to studies of American industrialization.<sup>viii</sup>

When I began research for my dissertation in 1972, the influence of Thompson was at its high point and women’s history as a new field of inquiry was in its infancy. I knew that I wanted to explore the impact of the industrial revolution on working people, but I was vague at the outset as to how best to proceed. Immersing myself in the existing historiography in that period, I decided that early factory work in the United States was much understudied and that the first factories would be a good focus to permit me to follow Thompson’s approach within an American context. As I read the literature, I was struck by the fact that once factory production expanded into northern New England with the founding of the Boston Manufacturing Company in Waltham, the vast majority of factory workers were young, single women recruited from the surrounding countryside. In my initial forays into archives I also discovered that there were extensive surviving runs of records of cotton textile firms of the Waltham-Lowell variety. I determined at the

outset that I would explore both the structure of the workforce and the nature of social relations in the early mills as well as the periodic outbreaks of labor struggles that provided flashpoints for understanding cultural conflict in early industrialization.

Having a background in the sciences and being versed in statistics, I chose a very un-Thompsonian approach to my primary sources. I grounded my study not so much in contemporary newspapers, pamphlets, and subsequent working-class memoirs that supported the argument in *The Making of the English Working Class*, but I decided to draw samples of workers from the surviving payrolls of the Hamilton Manufacturing Company in Lowell and to examine the changing makeup of the labor force at one of the signal Waltham-Lowell type mills in the years between its founding in 1826 and 1860, the last full year of operation before the outbreak of the Civil War. Gutman's seminal article only appeared in the *American Historical Review* in 1973, but even in my initial dissertation prospectus I had conceived of a component of the project that reflected the kind of approach he was taking. I knew that I wanted to trace a population of Yankee mill women from their mill employment in Lowell back to the rural communities where they were born and raised. I felt that a comparison of their farming roots and the mill experience would be a fruitful way to understand their responses to the demands of urban, industrial life.

Eventually I found my way to trace 175 mill women working at the Hamilton Manufacturing Company back to the three New Hampshire towns from which they came. The company had a set of records that had undoubtedly been kept by other firms, but had not survived for the others. In the company's register books, the Hamilton Company clerk recorded the names and hometowns, local residences, and work rooms for all the

men and women who worked at the company from its opening until the 1870s. When a worker entered or left employment or moved from one workroom to another, that information was recorded in the ruled columns of the register books. I keyed onto computer cards (this was the mid-1970s) the names and hometowns of more than seven hundred workers who began work at the Hamilton Company in the first half of 1836 and sorted the list by hometown to see whether some communities stood out in terms of sending workers into the mills. I found that New Hampshire towns predominated and proceeded to look for rich local records that might complement this finding. In the end, I found that for a fair number of New Hampshire towns, local historians writing in the late nineteenth century had published local histories replete with extensive local genealogies. I took the intersection of towns with strong local genealogies and towns that sent a good number of workers to the Hamilton Company in Lowell and settled on three communities, Boscawen, Canterbury, and Sutton, for in-depth study. I found that some 175 women came from these three communities to work at the Hamilton Company between 1830 and 1850 and this population became the group I examined as I revised the dissertation into what became my first book, *Women at Work*.

The process of tracing Lowell mill women back to their hometowns, determining the place of their families in these farming communities, recording their careers at the Hamilton Company, and, finally, tracing women forward to their marriages after mill employment, and determining their post-mill residences and the occupations of their husbands was an exciting stint of detective work that stretched over several years. The work included trips to New Hampshire and walks past old cellar holes and surviving stands of lilacs and day lilies where these women's homes once stood. In one instance I

was fortunate enough to spend the night in the home where one of my sample members had resided before and after working in Lowell. I employed genealogies, local tax records, church records, New Hampshire and Massachusetts vital records, and manuscript censuses of population and agriculture to learn as much as I could about the women, their families of origin, and their marriage families. While computers eventually permitted me to analyze what I learned about these women, the work itself was very much a handicraft labor. I worked with hard copies or microfilm of the records and employed time-honored 5x8 index cards for each woman worker and as I found out more about the worker or her family I added that information to the card.<sup>ix</sup>

My findings proved revealing, ones I could never have reached with a less labor-intensive approach. I found that the women came from middling farming families in their hometowns. Generally speaking both the propertyless and the very rich were underrepresented among families of Hamilton millhands.<sup>x</sup> Roughly 70 percent of fathers traced into local tax records had 1830 property holdings ranging from \$100 to \$1000. None had zero property and none had property valued at \$2,000 or more, although there were male household heads in the three towns with such low and high property holdings. I concluded that sheer economic need was probably not the major motivation of these women mill workers. I did discover, though, that the women came from large families, averaging more than seven children each. Mill daughters tended to be first or second daughters and I sensed that as they entered their mid- or late-teens, their family homes must have been very crowded. Younger siblings were coming of age to be helpful on the farm and these older daughters were probably thinking about their future marriages.

Perhaps a need to lay away some savings or to buy household linens motivated these young women to take the stage to Lowell.

These young women worked on average for 2.6 years at the Hamilton Company, beginning just before turning 20 and continuing until they were almost 22 and ½. This figure no doubt understates how long they worked in the mills because we don't know whether they worked for other Lowell mills or in other mill towns before or after their stints at the Hamilton Company. Other work I did in the course of research on this project suggests that many millhands were able to put away some earnings in the Lowell Institution for Savings, the major savings bank in antebellum Lowell. Savings often reached \$50-75. Since women were commonly earning \$3.00-\$3.50 a week and paying \$1.25 each week for room and board, savings on this scale probably represented six-nine months of earnings after expenses. For women who probably worked only 2½ to 3 years on average, this order of savings represented quite an accomplishment.

As I mentioned in the previous essay, there was controversy over whether mill work in any way unfitted women for marriage, or if perhaps mill women felt "too good" for their rural suitors. Tracing the mill women into their marriages provided evidence to address this contemporary debate. First, I found that 85 percent of the women did eventually marry, a figure that was comparable to that for New England women in their generation. Apparently mill work did not make women unfit to marry. There were interesting ways, however, than mill women differed from others in their age cohort. First, they tended to marry later than did other New England women and they married men just about the same age as themselves. For New England as a whole women tended to marry men who were 2 ½ or 3 years older than themselves. Moreover, about a third of

husbands of the former millhands worked in skilled trades, a proportion about equal to the share of farmers among husbands. Fully 65 percent of husbands were employed in non-agricultural occupations, compared to about 40 percent of husbands of other young married women from these communities. As the *Atlantic Monthly* writer I quoted in the previous essay had complained, mill women tended to marry mechanics or schoolteachers rather than farmers. Perhaps, as that writer had noted, “They remember their worn-out mothers.”<sup>xi</sup> In a final finding that speaks to this issue, slightly more than a third of these former millhands resided in Lowell or other urban centers after their marriages. Clearly employment in the mills was for many of these farmers’ daughters a first step toward permanent urban residence. The social origins study I conducted has in fact offered considerable evidence supporting contemporary writings in the antebellum mill debate. Indeed, it was hard to keep the women back on the farm after they’d seen Paris—or at least after Lowell.

The social origins study vindicated my decision to focus on textile company records and the value of record linkage moving out from the records of the Hamilton Company. These company records had additional value beyond the way they permitted me to reconstruct the mill workforce and its rural origins. The way the textile firms were organized created a good deal of correspondence that proved extremely valuable in my research. The Lowell mills, and really those of most of northern New England, were typically owned by a close-knit group of wealthy Boston merchants, a group that has come down to historians as the Boston Associates.<sup>xii</sup> It turned out that the millowners and members of the company boards of directors all resided in Boston and these boards met periodically in Boston to make important policy decisions about the mills. They

communicated their decisions with mill agents who resided in Lowell (in houses erected and owned by their employers) where they directed the day-to-day operations of the mills and supervised the work of the companies' boardinghouse keepers. Because the mills were located in Lowell and the companies' directors resided in Boston, there was a good deal of correspondence. When mill women turned out—that is, went on strike—in February 1834 and October 1836, for instance, mill agents wrote immediately to the treasurers of their firms—the head managers of the mills—to advise them about developments and let them know how they had responded. Any concessions that the mill agents might make to workers' demands would of course have had to be approved by the mill treasurers. The mill treasurers, in turn, typically met together in Boston to decide on a united course of action. They either reduced wages in unison or restored earlier cuts, but they simply did not act alone on these matters and thus compete with one another for their help.

Thus the surviving mill records at the Harvard Business School included not only payroll volumes and register books, but also incoming correspondence and copies of outgoing letters sent by mill agents to company treasurers. These letters are remarkably transparent and very revealing about conflicts in the mills and the attitudes of mill management. The attitudes of mill women are not well articulated in these managerial records, but other contemporary sources permit one to reconstruct where the millhands were coming from in these conflicts.

In January 1834 the directors of the Lowell mills—faced with falling cloth prices and growing inventories of cloth--met and recommended to their resident agents a 25 percent reduction in wages. After some back and forth, the agents posted identical

notices about the mills announcing wage cuts of roughly 15 percent. As one agent reported to his treasurer in Boston, “A good deal of excitement exists in all the mills...in relation to the proposed reduction. Papers are in circulation, & as I am informed, extensively signed, by which the females pledge themselves to leave if the reduction is made.”<sup>xiii</sup> One of the millhands’ petitions, signed by fifty weavers at the Suffolk Company, has survived and so we can read the women’s own words:

We the undersigned considering ourselves wronged and our privileges invaded by the unjust and unreasonable oblidge of our wages, do hereby mutually and cheerfully engage not to enter the factory on the first of March, nor after for the purpose of work, unless the paper which causes our dissatisfaction be removed and another signed...purport[ing] that our wages shall be after the same rate as previous to the first of March.<sup>xiv</sup>

The mill agents refused to rescind the wage cut and excitement grew within the mills until the women in one mill walked out and marched to the other mills to draw out their fellow operatives. The agent’s account of events leading up to the walkout is revealing about women’s advance planning of their actions. The agent found the women meeting in one room of the mill during their dinner break. They had excluded the male watchman, evidently considering him an outsider. The agent described his unsuccessful efforts to dissuade the operatives from their protest:

It appeared that before I entered the room, they had appointed a dictatress & voted to be governed by her in all cases. This woman...retorted upon me with no little vehemence, & declared that there was no cause for any reduction whatever, that the causes assigned for it were without foundation in fact, that she had to pay as much for a yard of cloth as ever & that there was no truth in the assertions of the Agents.

Shortly thereafter the meeting broke up inconclusively and the women returned to work. Apparently the ringleader “continually had a crowd around her,” which was disrupting work. The agent decided to discharge the woman and in response, “She declared that every girl in the room should leave with her, made a signal, and they all marched out & few returned the ensuing morning.”<sup>xv</sup>

A local newspaper offered a very similar account, indicating that the leader “waved her calash in the air as a signal to others,” who immediately turned out.<sup>xvi</sup> Both the agent’s and the reporter’s accounts indicate that the turn-out was not simply a spontaneous outburst of enraged individuals, but rather an organized, planned protest.

The turn-out truly disappointed the resident mill agents. One agent probably expressed the feelings of others when he wrote:

Notwithstanding the friendly and disinterested advice which has been on all proper occasions communicated to the girls of the Lawrence Mills a spirit of evil omen...has prevailed, and overcome the judgment & discretion of too many, and this morning a general turn-out from most of the rooms has been the consequence.<sup>xvii</sup>

Writing again, the Lawrence agent described the turn-out as an “amazonian display,” referring to the Amazons of Greek mythology. Later in the same later he commented, “This afternoon we have paid off several of these Amazons & presume they will leave town on Monday.”<sup>xviii</sup> This language was not unusual, but was shared generally among upper-class male observers. A reporter recorded the women’s procession around town and commented: “We are told that one of the leaders mounted a pump and made a flaming Mary Woolstonecroft [sic] speech on the rights of women and

the iniquities of the “monied aristocracy.”<sup>xix</sup> This reference to the English feminist, Wollstonecraft, conveyed much the same judgment. No doubt most educated men in Boston and Lowell in the 1830s would have viewed Wollstonecraft, like the Amazons before her, as quite unsexed.

While contemporary newspaper coverage judged the striking women harshly, it also reported the words of their circulars and thus offered something of a mouthpiece for their leaders. A petition among the women began:

#### UNION IS POWER

Our present object is to have union and exertion, and we remain in possession of our unquestionable rights. We circulate this paper wishing to obtain the names of all who imbibe the spirit of our Patriotic Ancestors, who preferred privation to bondage, and parted with all that renders life desirable and even life itself to procure independence for their children. The oppressing hand of avarice would enslave us, and to gain their object, they gravely tell us of the pressure of the times, this we are already sensible of, and deplore it. If any are in want, the Ladies will be compassionate and assist them; but we prefer to have the disposing of our charities in our own hands; and as we are free, we would remain in possession of what kind providence has bestowed upon us, and remain daughters of freemen still.<sup>xx</sup>

Here the mill women expressed their pride and sense of independence as “daughters of freemen.” They were identifying not primarily as working women, but rather as daughters of propertied rural farmers. This was an important ideological implication of the common social origins of women workers that I discussed earlier. In other descriptions of the protests, reporters noted that the women saw themselves as patriotic Whigs while they viewed the millowners as “Tories in disguise.”<sup>xxi</sup> Thus did

the striking women lay claim to their revolutionary heritage and identify with grandfathers who fought in the Revolution.

Integral to this appropriation of their revolutionary heritage was a clear statement of the women's sense of their own worth and dignity. As independent "daughters of freemen" they felt no deference toward their employers; they would certainly not call them their masters. They felt themselves the social equals of their overseers and even of the millowners themselves. The wage reductions, however, struck at their assertion of equality and the turn-out revealed the women's refusal to view themselves as subordinate`.

This particular strike lasted only two days with some women returning to their rural homes, but with the vast majority returning to work, accepting the wage cuts. Two and a half years later, however, mill women had greater success, when they turned out to protest an increase in the cost of their room and board at company boardinghouses. In this second conflict, women operatives created a Lowell Factory Girls Association to orchestrate their efforts. I quoted from their founding document in the last essay. The association organized "committees from the several corporations, to make provisions for those who have not the means to pay their board."<sup>xxii</sup> Apparently the Association assisted some women in paying their boardinghouse charges. For others, the group paid their stagecoach fare home, permitting them to leave Lowell for the duration of the strike. This protest was more carefully planned than the earlier one, and one agent complained about the effectiveness of the turn-out. He wrote: "This was in many instances no doubt the result of calculation and contrivance. After the original turn-out they [the millhands] would assail a particular room—as for instance all the warpers, or all the warp spinners...

and this would close the mill as effectually as if all the girls in the mill had left.”<sup>xxiii</sup> By these tactics the women showed that they understood that clothmaking was a vertically integrated work process. If they could close down one or two steps in the process, they could deny work to all the others. If there was no spun yarn, it did not matter whether the weavers walked out or not. They simply couldn’t work and the millowners had to send them home. A local storekeeper and lay preacher, Aaron Lummus, confirmed the agent’s account when he noted: “It was remarkable, that a few, probably less than half a dozen young women, should manage this whole affair with so much dexterity and correct judgement, that no power, or skill, could be successfully employed against them.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

The result of my study of Yankee mill women makes concrete their agency during these early years of the industrial revolution. Understanding their rural origins and reconstructing the ways they employed their revolutionary heritage and republican values makes understandable their responses to declining conditions in the mills. Their responses were not identical to those of workingmen in the same period, because they were situated quite differently in the New England economy of the antebellum decades. As young women they had different expectations than did their brothers, but those differences did not make them passive victims of an all-powerful management. They viewed themselves as daughters of freeman and demanded respect. At times they protested on their own, as in the case of their turn-outs in Lowell in the 1830s. At other times, they allied with workingmen, as in the case of the Ten Hour Movement during the 1840s. They defended their rights and, as I discussed in the previous essay, they sought to reform varied injustices in society around them. Their working lives and their protests

are important elements in our changing understanding of the nature of the industrial revolution in nineteenth-century America.

Mill women, of course, were not the only wage-earning women in industry in the decades before the Civil War. And in the years after *Women at Work* appeared, new scholarship appeared that offered new insights into the experiences of other working women. The most valuable of these studies was a fine-tuned analysis of the place of gender in New England shoemaking across the nineteenth century, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910*, by Mary H. Blewett.<sup>xxv</sup> Blewett explores the changing nature of production and the gender division of labor as shoemaking evolved over more than a century. She covers much of the historical terrain studied earlier by Paul Faler and Alan Dawley, but she does so in a way that highlights gender issues much more concretely. There is a very rich chapter, for instance, that examines the nature of shoebinding in the era in which this step in the shoemaking process was typically outsourced to women working by hand in their own homes. Blewett makes use of the records of shoe merchants who put the work out into rural homes, much as the early spinning mills of Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut had drawn upon handloom weavers working in their farming homes. She examines as well the movement of young, single women into stitching shops that grew up in New England shoe towns in the 1850s and '60s.<sup>xxvi</sup> We see in this analysis that women were always integral to the region's shoe industry, but they were largely excluded from the male artisan tradition centered in the small shops known as ten-footers.

The high point of Blewett's analysis comes in her discussion of the New England shoe strike that began in February 1860. While Faler and Dawley both analyzed this

notable strike, the largest in the nation up to that date, neither had grappled with the contradictory nature of women's participation in the struggle. Women shoeworkers proved divided, as Blewett convincingly demonstrates, because women held different places in the family economy that grew up in shoemaking in these decades. The majority of shoebinders at the time of the strike were probably the wives and daughters of male shoemakers who worked part-time binding shoe uppers in their homes in Lynn, Marblehead, Haverhill, and other shoe towns. They were strong supporters of the shoemaking men in their families and came to support increases in male wages as the key demand of the 1860 strike. However, there were also a good many young, single women employed in stitching shops, working on steam-powered sewing machines stitching shoe uppers. These women typically worked full time and earned much better wages than hand binders, assisted as they were by the productivity of power-driving machinery. These women often came to Lynn and boarded in the city, much like the Yankee millhands at this time. At strike meetings these single, self-supporting women demanded wage increases for themselves as well as for male shoemakers. While earlier treatments of the strike emphasized solely women's role as supporters and helpmeets of striking male shoeworkers, Blewett's analysis reveals this significant divide among the strikers. She uses a close analysis of newspaper accounts of strike meetings to show the divide between older women workers who saw their interests served by the ability of workingmen to earn high wages sufficient to support their families and younger shoestitchers who needed to support themselves and did not necessarily rely on shoemaking fathers or husbands for their livelihood. In the end, the male-dominated family economy triumphed and single female stitchers had to accommodate to the

artisan/family economy ideology that was reflected in strikers' demands and the final settlement. As Blewett has argued, in the iconic demonstration in Lynn that has come to represent the shoe strike, "men and women paraded under banners that elevated men's demands and accepted that women's place in the strike was largely to provide moral support for their men."<sup>xxvii</sup>

The analysis of female millhands and shoestitchers demonstrates the importance of exploring the advent of the industrial revolution with a sensitivity to the gender division of labor and the quite different places that men and women occupied both at the workplace and within the working-class family economy. The new interest in gender in the past twenty years has made possible a much more nuanced and interesting examination of the character and the impact of the industrial revolution on working people in the United States. What began as a general (but unconsciously ungendered) analysis of the response of working people to industrial capitalism in England and the United States can now be seen for what it actually was—an analysis limited to the male experience of the industrial revolution. More recent gendered treatments of industrialization have demonstrated a far more complex story—really multiple stories. We can now focus on the experiences of both men and women and come to understand more fully relations between men and women as they evolved under the influence of the industrial revolution. In many ways the changing story of the industrial revolution is really a paradigm for the ways that our broader interpretations of American History have been changing over the past twenty or thirty years. No longer do historians accept a broad, unselfconscious focus on male history as the basis for our understanding of major developments in American History. Increasingly historians are finding they need to

introduce gender as a “useful category in historical analysis,” one that renders more complex their understanding of national or even global history.<sup>xxviii</sup> We find a need to break down facile generalizations and explore the multiple experiences that are often divided along class, gender, racial, or ethnic divides. Once we have a fuller understanding of these multiple stories, our challenge is to synthesize these distinct but interrelated accounts into a more complex and more complete version of historical reality. That of course is the same challenge you face in bringing history alive to your students.

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<sup>i</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966); see also an influential article, E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56-97.

<sup>ii</sup> Commons’s two most important works were *History of Labour in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1918-1935); *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, 10 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1910).

<sup>iii</sup> Two excellent overviews of the Commons School and the labor history that emerged out of this approach are found in David Montgomery, “The Conventional Wisdom,” *Labor History* 13 (1972), 107-36; and David Montgomery, “To Study the People: The American Working Class,” *Labor History* 21 (1980): 485-512.

<sup>iv</sup> Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). The title essay of this collection appeared earlier, in 1973, in the *American Historical Review*.

See also Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor*

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Activism, 1865-1925 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For discussion of political and ideological developments that accompanied the early industrial revolution, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). For a perceptive call for the integration of women into our understanding of labor history, see Sue Benson, "The 1920's Through the Looking Glass of Gender: A Response to David Montgomery," *International Labor and Working-Class History* No. 32 (Fall 1987): 25-30.

<sup>v</sup> Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*, 13.

<sup>vi</sup> Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society," 25-30. On the absence of considerations of gender in Thompson's work, see Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), chap. 4.

<sup>vii</sup> Two pathbreaking early works in American women's history were Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition* (New York: Schocken, 1967); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

<sup>viii</sup> Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

<sup>ix</sup> I discuss the methods of this study in Appendix 2, *Women at Work*.

<sup>x</sup> The findings in this paragraph summarize my argument in *Women at Work*, chap. 3.

<sup>xi</sup> "Farming Life in New England," *Atlantic Monthly* 2 (August, 1858): 341.

<sup>xii</sup> Robert F. Dalzell, Jr, *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>xiii</sup> Tremont-Suffolk Mills, vol FN-1, John Aiken to Henry Hall, 12 Feb. 1834, Baker Library, Harvard Business School; hereafter BL.

<sup>xiv</sup> Appleton Company, unbound papers, American Museum of Textile History.

<sup>xv</sup> Lawrence Company, vol. MAB-1, 15 Feb. 1834, BL.

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- <sup>xvi</sup> *Boston Evening Transcript*, 17 Feb. 1834.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Lawrence Company, vol. MAB-1, 14 Feb. 1834, BL.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Lawrence Company, vol. MAB-1, 15 Feb. 1834, BL.
- <sup>xix</sup> *Boston Evening Transcript*, 17 Feb. 1834.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Boston Evening Transcript*, 18 Feb. 1834.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *The Man*, 22 Feb. 1834, as quoted in Caroline Ware, *The Early New England Cotton Manufacture A Study in Industrial Beginnings* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966; originally published in 1931), 274.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *National Labourer*, 29 Oct. 1836, as quoted in John B. Andrews and W.D.P. Bliss, *History of Women in Trades Unions* Washington: G.P.O., 1911), 30; *Boston Daily Times*, 6 Oct. 1836.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Tremont-Suffolk Mills, vol. FN-1, John Aiken to Henry Hall, 10 Oct. 1836, BL.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> “Records of Some of the Principal Events in the Life of Aaron Lummus,” 287. MS autobiographical memoir, 1850-1857, Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Mass.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*, chap. 3.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Mary H. Blewett, introduction to “How Did Gender and Family Divisions among Shoeworkers Shape the 1860 New England Strike?” a document project in *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000*, March 2004, accessed at <http://www.alexanderstreet6.com/wasm/wasmrestricted/DP49/intro.htm>.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), chap. 2.