

The Gilded Age: Power and Privilege

Directions:

I: For your assigned group (this packet), identify:

1. Who are you? _____

2. Where do you live? _____

II. HOMEWORK

Annolight your packet marking/writing notes that would help to fill in part III below (you will do this in class tomorrow with your group)

III: Classwork (to do with your group in class)

1. How much power does your historical character have during the time? Put a percentage # on the spectrum below.

Amount of Power: 0%-----100%

Provide **four** examples of WHY you put your number where you did.

2. How much agency (power to change their lives) does your historical figure have?

Amount of Agency: 0%-----100%

Provide **four** examples of WHY you put your number where you did.

3. Does your historical figure represent individualism or collectivism?

0%-----100%

Provide four examples of WHY you put your number where you did.

IV: The Gilded Age

gilded – based on pretense; deceptively pleasing

gild

tr.v. gild ed or gilt (glt), gild ing, gilds

1. To cover with or as if with a thin layer of gold.
2. To give an often deceptively attractive or improved appearance to.
3. Archaic: To smear with blood.

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/gilded> 12/4/2006

Read the definition of the Gilded Age above. Does your historical figure or person represent the gold layer or the grittiness underneath?

Provide four examples for your answer.

V: Prepare a group motto for your group based on the **amount of power and privilege** you have. Prepare **three** pieces of evidence to share that prove your motto.

VI: As your classmates present, take notes on the amount of power and privilege they have. Get specific details.

- a) Elite
- b) People living in the West
- c) Union Member
- d) Poor
- e) Chinese Immigrant
- f) Captain of Industry/Robber Barons
- g) European Immigrant
- h) Government Official
- i) Farmer
- j) Women and Child Labor (marginalized laborers)

VI: As your classmates present, take notes on the amount of power and privilege they have. Get specific details.

- a) Elite
- b) People living in the West
- c) Union Member
- d) Poor
- e) Chinese Immigrant
- f) Captain of Industry/Robber Barons
- g) European Immigrant
- h) Government Official
- i) Farmer

Labor and the Republic

As Mitchell's remark suggests, more than at almost any other moment in American history, public discourse in the late nineteenth century fractured along class lines. And from the labor movement arose a sustained assault on the understanding of freedom grounded in Social Darwinism and liberty of contract. Caught between nostalgia for the era of small production and frank acknowledgment of the triumph of the factory and the wage labor system, labor reformers of the Gilded Age were attracted to a wide array of programs, from the eight-hour day to public employment in hard times, currency reform, anarchism, socialism, and the creation of a vaguely defined "cooperative commonwealth." But uniting these various plans and panaceas was an "ideology of disinheritance," the conviction that new social conditions amounted to a loss of Americans' birthright of freedom. In the course of its campaigns, labor developed a full-blown critique of the prevailing definition of liberty. Americans, declared Terence V. Powderly, head of the era's largest labor organization, the Knights of Labor, were not "the free people that we imagine we are."¹⁶

Emancipation cast a long shadow over labor reform discourse in the Gilded Age. Like the courts and Social Darwinists, labor spoke the language of free labor and defined the manliness of the struggle against slavery—partly as a continuation of prewar rhetoric and partly because the slavery metaphor offered an effective way of appealing to the reform-minded middle class. "The laborer," wrote eight-hour reformer Ira Steward, "instinctively feels that something of slavery still remains, or that something of freedom is yet to come." Although, by and large, the labor movement did little to address the problems of the former slaves or to identify with them as dispossessed laborers, it adopted and expanded the Reconstruction language of equal citizenship. "Under the guise of republican freedom," claimed Florence Kelley in 1889, "we have degenerated into a nation of mock citizens." Only when the "social structure" conformed to the egalitarian ideals embodied in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, proclaimed a Boston labor newspaper, could genuine freedom be secured. Labor spokesmen referred to the Thirteenth Amendment as a "glorious labor amendment" that enshrined the dignity of labor in the Constitution and whose prohibition of involuntary servitude was violated by court injunctions undermining the right to strike. Reaching back across the divide of the Civil War, labor defined employers as a new "slave power," called for the "emancipation and enfranchisement of all who labor," and spoke of an "irrepressible conflict between the wage system of labor and the republican system

of government." Concentrated capital, warned George E. McNeill, a shoemaker and woolmill operative who became one of the movement's most eloquent writers, had become "a greater power than that of the State." The remedy was not to return to the days of the small-scale craftsman, but to "engraft republican principles into our industrial system," by guaranteeing a basic set of economic rights for all Americans.¹⁷

Through the 1880s, the "abolition of the wage system" remained the stated goal of labor organizations. When congressional committees in the late 1870s and early 1880s traveled the country taking testimony on "the relations of capital and labor," they encountered a steady stream of complaints from labor leaders and ordinary workers—low wages, the power of monopolies, grinding poverty—summarized in the reinvigorated language of "wage slavery." One correspondent of a labor newspaper presented American development as a saga of successive forms of slavery: feudalism, chattel slavery, and wage labor, all members of the same "species."

The growing number of women working for wages in dire circumstances were also described as suffering from a new form of slavery. In 1888, the *Chicago Times* published a remarkable series of articles by reporter Nell Cusack under the title "City Slave Girls," exposing wretched working conditions in the city's factories and sweatshops. The articles unleashed a flood of letters to the editor from women workers themselves, many of whom employed the language of liberty. Domestic service was especially singled out as "a slave's life," as one woman put it, with "long hours, late and early, seven days in the week, bossed and ordered about as niggers before the war." Many complained about sexual abuse on the job—another analogy to chattel slavery—while rejecting the widespread opinion that work outside the home inevitably injured a woman's virtue. The problem, "A Working Woman" observed, was not immorality, but insufficient pay and inadequate job opportunities. Why, she wondered, "in this free country have not women the right to choose their own avocations?" So widespread, on both sides of the Atlantic, was the rhetoric of wage slavery that when the English economic historian John K. Ingram published his *History of Slavery and Serfdom* in 1895, he felt compelled to include an appendix on the "lax" uses of the word "slavery," foremost among them its application to wage workers.¹⁸

But more than reiterating the venerable idea that wage labor was incompatible with freedom, labor offered a powerful critique of a contract ideology that justified increasing inequality in the name of liberty. In *Capital*, Karl Marx, whose works were now beginning to circulate in the United States, had ridiculed the essence of liberty of contract thought—the assumption of equality in the

In Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the summer of 1885, whites attacked five hundred Chinese miners, massacring twenty-eight of them in cold blood.

The new immigrants became laborers, housepainters, stonecutters, ditchdiggers. They were often imported en masse by contractors. One Italian man, told he was going to Connecticut to work on the railroad, was taken instead to sulfate mines in the South, where he and his fellows were watched over by armed guards in their barracks and in the mines, given only enough money to pay for their railroad fare and tools, and very little to eat. He and others decided to escape. They were captured at gunpoint, ordered to work or die; they still refused and were brought before a judge, put in manacles, and, five months after their arrival, finally dismissed. "My comrades took the train for New York. I had only one dollar, and with this, not knowing either the country or the language, I had to walk to New York. After forty-two days I arrived in the city utterly exhausted."

Their conditions led sometimes to rebellion. A contemporary observer told how "some Italians who worked in a locality near Deal Lake, New Jersey, failing to receive their wages, captured the contractor and shut him up in the shanty, where he remained a prisoner until the county sheriff came with a posse to his rescue."

A traffic in immigrant child laborers developed, either by contract with desperate parents in the home country or by kidnapping. The children were then supervised by "padrones" in a form of slavery, sometimes sent out as beggar musicians. Proves of them roamed the streets of New York and Philadelphia.

As the immigrants became naturalized citizens, they were brought into the American two-party system, invited to be loyal to one party or the other, their political energy thus siphoned into elections. An article in *L'Italia*, in November 1894, called for Italians to support the Republican party.

When American citizens of foreign birth refuse to ally themselves with the Republican Party, they make war upon their own welfare. The Republican Party stands for all that the people fight for in the Old World. It is the champion of freedom, progress, order, and law. It is the steadfast foe of monarchial class rule.

There were 5½ million immigrants in the 1880s, 4 million in the 1890s, creating a labor surplus that kept wages down. The immigrants were more controllable, more helpless than native workers; they were

culturally displaced, at odds with one another, therefore useful as strike-breakers. Often their children worked, intensifying the problem of an oversized labor force and joblessness; in 1880 there were 1,118,000 children under sixteen (one out of six) at work in the United States. With everyone working long hours, families often became strangers to one another. A pants presser named Morris Rosenfeld wrote a poem, "My Boy," which became widely reprinted and recited:

I have a little boy at home,

A pretty little son;

I think sometimes the world is mine

In him, my only one. . . .

'Ere dawn my labor drives me forth;

'Tis night when I am free;

A stranger am I to my child;

And stranger my child to me. . . .

Women immigrants became servants, prostitutes, housewives, factory workers, and sometimes rebels. Leonora Barry was born in Ireland and brought to the United States. She got married, and when her husband died she went to work in a hosiery mill in upstate New York to support three young children, earning 65 cents her first week. She joined the Knights of Labor, which had fifty thousand women members in 192 women's assemblies by 1886. She became "master workman" of her assembly of 927 women, and was appointed to work for the Knights as a general investigator, to "go forth and educate her sister working-women and the public generally as to their needs and necessities." She described the biggest problem of women workers: "Through long years of endurance they have acquired, as a sort of second nature, the habit of submission and acceptance without question of any terms offered them, with the pessimistic view of life in which they see no hope." Her report for the year 1888 showed: 537 requests to help women organize, 100 cities and towns visited, 1,900 leaflets distributed.

In 1884, women's assemblies of textile workers and hatmakers went on strike. The following year in New York, cloak and shirt makers, men and women (holding separate meetings but acting together), went on strike. The *New York World* called it "a revolt for bread and butter." They won higher wages and shorter hours.

That winter in Yonkers, a few women carpet weavers were fired for joining the Knights, and in the cold of February, 2,500 women walked

out and picketed the mill. Only seven hundred of them were members of the Knights, but all the strikers soon joined. The police attacked the picket line and arrested them, but a jury found them not guilty. A great dinner was held by working people in New York to honor them, with two thousand delegates from unions all over the city. The strike lasted six months, and the women won some of their demands, getting back their jobs, but without recognition of their union.

What was astonishing in so many of these struggles was not that the strikers did not win all that they wanted, but that, against such great odds, they dared to resist, and were not destroyed.

Perhaps it was the recognition that day-to-day combat was not enough, that fundamental change was needed, which stimulated the growth of revolutionary movements at this time. The Socialist Labor party, formed in 1877, was tiny, and torn by internal arguments, but it had some influence in organizing unions among foreign workers. In New York, Jewish socialists organized and put out a newspaper. In Chicago, German revolutionaries, along with native-born radicals like Albert Parsons, formed Social Revolutionary clubs. In 1883, an anarchist congress took place in Pittsburgh. It drew up a manifesto:

... All laws are directed against the working people.... Even the school serves only the purpose of furnishing the offspring of the wealthy with those qualities necessary to uphold their class domination. The children of the poor get scarcely a formal elementary training, and this, too, is mainly directed to such branches as tend to producing prejudices, arrogance, and servility; in short, want of sense. The Church finally seeks to make complete idiots out of the mass and to make them forego the paradise on earth by promising a fictitious heaven. The capitalist press, on the other hand, takes care of the confusion of spirits in public life.... The workers can therefore expect no help from any capitalistic party in their struggle against the existing system. They must achieve their liberation by their own efforts. As in former times, a privileged class never surrenders its tyranny, neither can it be expected that the capitalists of this age will give up their rulership without being forced to do it....

The manifesto asked "equal rights for all without distinction to sex or race." It quoted the *Communist Manifesto*: "Workmen of all lands, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win!"

In Chicago, the new International Working People's Association had five thousand members, published newspapers in five languages, organized mass demonstrations and parades, and through its leadership in

strikes was a powerful influence in the twenty-two unions that made up the Central Labor Union of Chicago. There were differences in theory among all these revolutionary groups, but the theorists were often brought together by the practical needs of labor struggles, and there were many in the mid-1880s.

In early 1886, the Texas & Pacific Railroad fired a leader of the district assembly of the Knights of Labor, and this led to a strike which spread throughout the Southwest, tying up traffic as far as St. Louis and Kansas City. Nine young men recruited in New Orleans as marshals, brought to Texas to protect company property, learned about the strike and quit their jobs, saying, "as man to man we could not justifiably go to work and take the bread out of our fellow-workmen's mouths, no matter how much we needed it ourselves." They were then arrested for defrauding the company by refusing to work, and sentenced to three months in the Galveston county jail.

The strikers engaged in sabotage. A news dispatch from Archison, Kansas:

At 12:45 this morning the men on guard at the Missouri Pacific roundhouse were surprised by the appearance of 35 or 40 masked men. The guards were corralled in the oil room by a detachment of the visitors who stood guard with pistols... while the rest of them thoroughly disabled 12 locomotives which stood in the stalls.

In April, in East St. Louis, there was a battle between strikers and police. Seven workmen were killed, whereupon workers burned the freight depot of the Louisville & Nashville. The governor declared martial law and sent in seven hundred National Guardsmen. With mass arrests, violent attacks by sheriffs and deputies, no support from the skilled, better-paid workers of the Railway Brotherhoods, the strikers could not hold out. After several months they surrendered, and many of them were blacklisted.

By the spring of 1886, the movement for an eight-hour day had grown. On May 1, the American Federation of Labor, now five years old, called for nationwide strikes wherever the eight-hour day was refused. Terence Powderly, head of the Knights of Labor, opposed the strike, saying that employers and employees must first be educated on the eight-hour day, but assemblies of the Knights made plans to strike. The grand chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers opposed the eight-hour day, saying "two hours less work means two hours more loafing about the corners and two hours more for drink," but railroad workers did not agree and supported the eight-hour movement.

HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES



The same economic forces which created unprecedented fortunes had another side. The new, more capital intensive industries prevented many from taking advantage of the emerging opportunities. With businesses determined to secure a profit and a government that refused to intervene, large numbers of Americans had increasingly less control over their lives, working longer hours in more dangerous jobs for comparatively less pay. The response of American workers varied, though many sought to change the system through collective action such as labor unions and political parties. The following documents provide a glimpse of some of the conditions which these workers faced and also chronicles their responses.

135

"THE STORY OF A SWEATSHOP GIRL" (1902)

The adaptation of machines to methods of production brought changes to the work-force as well as to how goods were made. The garment industry was among those businesses affected by the change. The development of standard clothing sizes, the use of the electrically powered sewing machine, and the availability of low-wage workers allowed for the mass production of inexpensive clothes for both men and women. In most instances garment businesses were located in cities. Often taking over a floor or floors of a former warehouse, numerous workers and machines were crammed into these floors, creating crowded and dangerous work conditions that became known as the "sweatshop." The workforce was usually young females, often recent immigrants, as the garment trades offered women one of the few sources of income outside the home. These women assembled parts of clothing, performing the same sewing task repetitiously for hours on end. In 1902, Sadie Frowne, a Polish immigrant, told her story as a sweatshop girl to a reporter from the news magazine *The Independent*. Excerpts of her account follow.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Describe Frowne's work and the conditions of her employment.

How does she view this work?

How could such a situation exist?

Why does she indicate that she belongs to a union, but is "not a Socialist or an Anarchist"?

What does this document reveal about labor in this time period?

unt Fanny had always been anxious for me to get an education, as I did not know how to read or write, and she thought that was wrong. I was different in Poland from what they are in this country, and I was too busy to learn to read and write. So when mother died I thought I'd try to learn a trade and then I could go to school at night and learn to speak the English language well.

I went to work in Allen street (Manhattan) in what they call a sweatshop, making skirts by machine. I was new at the work and the foreman led me a great deal.

Now, then," he would say, "this place is not for you to be looking around and tending to your work. That is what you have to do."

I did not know at first that you must not look around and talk, and I made my mistakes with the sewing, so that I was often called a "stupid animal." I made \$4 a week by working six days in the week. For there are two Sabbaths here—our own Sabbath, that comes on a Saturday, and the Christian Sabbath that comes on Sunday. It is against our law to work on our own Sabbath, so we work on their Sabbath....

Two years ago I came to this place, Brownsville, where so many of my people are, and where I have friends. I got work in a factory making undershirts—all sorts of cheap undershirts, like cotton and calico for the summer woolen for the winter, but never the silk, satin or velvet undershirts. I earned \$4.50 a week and lived on \$2 a week, the same as before....

Isn't piecework in our factory, but one is paid by the amount of work; just the same. So it is like piecework. All the hands get different amounts, some as low as \$3.50 and some of the men as high as \$16 a week. The factory is in the third story of a brick building. It is in a room twenty feet and fourteen broad. There are fourteen machines in it. I and the daughter of the people with whom I live work two of these machines. The other workers are all men, some young and some old....

I get up at half-past five o'clock every morning and make myself a cup of coffee on the oil stove. I eat a bit of bread and perhaps some fruit and then go to work. Often I get there soon after six o'clock so as to be in good time, though the factory does not open till seven. I have heard that there is a sort of clock calls you at the very time you want to get up, but I can't believe that use. I don't see how the clock would know.

I seven o'clock we all sit down to our machines and the boss brings to me one pile of work that he or she is to finish during the day, what they call an English their "stint." This pile is put down beside the machine and as

soon as a skirt is done it is laid on the other side of the machine. Sometimes the work is not all finished by six o'clock and then the one who is behind must work overtime. Sometimes one is finished ahead of time and gets away at four or five o'clock, but generally we are not done till six o'clock. The machines go like mad all day, because the faster you work the more money you get. Sometimes in my haste I get my finger caught and the needle goes right through it. It goes so quick, tho, that it does not hurt much. I bind the finger up with a piece of cotton and go on working. We all have accidents like that. Where the needle goes through the nail it makes a sore finger, or where it splinters a bone it does much harm. Sometimes a finger has to come off. Generally, tho, one can be cured by a salve.

All the time we are working the boss walks about examining the finished garments and making us do them over again if they are not just right. So we have to be careful as well as swift. But I am getting so good at the work that within a year I will be making \$7 a week, and then I can save at least \$3.50 a week. I have over \$200 saved now.

The machines are all run by foot power, and at the end of the day one feels so weak that there is a great temptation to lie right down and sleep. But you must go out and get air, and have some pleasure. So instead of lying down I go out, generally with Henry. Sometimes we go to Coney Island, where there are good dancing places, and sometimes we go to Ulmer Park to picnics....

I am going back to night school again this winter. Plenty of my friends go there. Some of the women in my class are more than forty years of age. Like me, they did not have a chance to learn anything in the old country. It is good to have an education; it makes you feel higher. Ignorant people are all low. People say now that I am clever and fine in conversation.

We have just finished a strike in our business. It spread all over and the United Brotherhood of Garment Workers was in it. That takes in the cloak-makers, coatmakers, and all the others. We struck for shorter hours, and after being out four weeks won the fight. We only have to work nine and a half hours a day and we get the same pay as before. So the union does good after all in spite of what some people say against it—that it just takes our money and does nothing.

I pay 25 cents a month to the union, but I do not begrudge that because it is for our benefit. The next strike is going to be for a raise of wages, which we all ought to have. But tho I belong to the Union I am not a Socialist or an Anarchist. I don't know exactly what those things mean. There is a little expense for charity, too. If any worker is injured or sick we all give money to help....

136

THE CREDIT SYSTEM OF THE SOUTH (1894)

The Civil War destroyed the slave-based, plantation system of the South and brought revolutionary economic adjustments for both whites and African Americans. Mann

Harriet Hanson Robinson, "Characteristics of the Early Factory Girls" (1898)

recruited young women from rural New England as their labor force. They assumed these "girls" would be docile and easily managed. Instead, the young women in the Lowell mills formed reading circles, organized to demand their rights as laborers and as women, and agitated for better workplace conditions. They printed leaflets and published their own newspaper, the *Lowell Offering*. Here, Harriet Hanson Robinson, who started work in the mills when she was only ten, recounts a "turn out," or strike, of the Lowell women, and describes the conditions of women factory workers in the 1830s.

When I look back into the factory life of fifty or sixty years ago, I do not see what is called "a class" of young men and women going to and from their daily work, like so many ants that cannot be distinguished one from another; I see them as individuals, with personalities of their own. This one has about her the atmosphere of her early home. That one is impelled by a strong and noble purpose. The other—what she is, has been an influence for good to me and to all womankind. Yet they were a class of factory operatives, and were spoken of (as the same class is spoken of now) as a set of persons who earned their daily bread, whose condition was fixed, and who must continue to spin and to weave to the end of their natural existence. Nothing but this was expected of them, and they were not supposed to be capable of social or mental improvement. That they could be educated and developed into something more than work-people, was an idea that had not yet entered the public mind. So little does one class of persons really know about the thoughts and aspirations of another! It was the good fortune of these early mill-girls to reach the people of that time that this sort of labor is not degrading; that the operative is not only "capable of virtue," but also capable of self-cultivation.

At the time the Lowell cotton-mills were started, the factory girl was the low-est among women. In England, and in France particularly, great injustice had been done to her real character; she was represented as subjected to influences that could not fail to destroy her purity and self-respect. In the eyes of her over-est the was but a brute, slave, to be beaten, pinched, and pushed about. It was to overcome this prejudice that such high wages had been offered to women that they might be induced to become mill-girls, in spite of the opprobrium that was hanging to this "degrading occupation." At first only a few came; for, though they were paid in "cash," there were many who

may feel the satisfaction of having done what we could.

—that while the slaves continue to suffer, and when they shout defiance—state." Let the zeal and love, the faith and works of our English sisters progress such a petition, our legislators will arise as did those of England, and enter long has been presented. And do you think these labors will be in vain to those of the system whose place it supplies. One petition two million was remarked in England that women did much to abolish Slavery in 1838. Numerous petitions from them have been presented to the Queen, to abolish the apprenticeship with its cruelties. Nor are they now idle. Numerous petitions from them have been presented to the Queen, to abolish the apprenticeship with its cruelties. Nor are they now idle. Numerous petitions from them have been presented to the Queen, to abolish the apprenticeship with its cruelties.

There is, therefore, no cause for doubting or despair, but rather that the South look with jealousy upon our measures shows that they do not exercise them; and though often turned away unanswered, let us exert our sex and of our kind. We have these rights, however, from our action: and they deny our right to petition and to remonstrate against one more as yet? Men who hold the rod over slaves, rule in the count has called the attention of the South to the subject. How could we expect were very many from the women of the North on the subject of slave the proceedings of Congress, and there have been seen that among the South already turns pale at the number sent. They have read it. It is therefore peculiarly your duty to petition. Do you say, "I do not have no such right; it is only through petitions that you can reach the petition. Men may settle this and other questions at the ballot-box of my birth, to entreat you to come up to this work. Especially let of Philadelphia allow me as a Southern woman, with much attachment

still preferred to go on working at some more genteel employment at seventy-five cents a week and their board.

But in a short time the prejudice against the factory labor wore away, and the Lowell mills became filled with blooming and energetic New England women. They were naturally intelligent, had mother-wit, and fell easily into the ways of their new life. They soon began to associate with those who formed the community in which they had come to live, and were invited to their houses. They went to the same church, and sometimes married into some of the best families. Or if they returned to their secluded homes again, instead of being looked down upon as "factory girls" by the squire's or lawyer's family, they were more often welcomed as coming from the metropolis, bringing new fashions, new books, and new ideas with them.

In 1831 Lowell was little more than a factory village. Several corporations were started, and the cotton-mills belonging to them were building. Help was in great demand; and the stories were told all over the country of the new factory town and the high wages that were offered to all classes of work-people,—stories that reached the ears of mechanics' and farmers' sons, and gave new life to lonely and dependent women in distant towns and farmhouses. Into this Yankee El Dorado these needy people began to pour by the various modes of travel known to those slow old days. The stage-coach and the canal-boat came every day, always filled with the new recruits for this army of useful people. The mechanic and machinist came, each with his home-made chest of tools, and oftentimes his wife and little ones. The widow came with her little flock of scanty housekeeping goods to open a boarding-house or variety store, and so provided a home for her fatherless children. Many farmers' daughters came to earn money to complete their wedding outfit, or buy the bride's share of housekeeping articles.

Women with past histories came, to hide their griefs and their identity, and to earn an honest living in the "sweat of their brow." Single young men came, full of hope and life, to get money for an education, or to lift the mortgage from the home-farm. Troops of young girls came by stages and baggage-wagons, men often being employed to go to other States and to Canada, to collect them at so much a head, and deliver them to the factories. . . .

These country girls had queer names, which added to the singularity of their appearance. Samantha, Triphena, Plumy, Kezia, Ascneth, Elgardy, Leah, Ruhamah, Lovey, Almarretta, Sarepta, and Florilla were among them.

Their dialect was also very peculiar. On the broken English and Scotch of their ancestors was ingrafted the nasal Yankee twang; so that many of them, when they had just come down, spoke a language almost unintelligible. But the severe discipline and ridicule which met them was as good as a school education, and they were soon taught the "city way of speaking." . . .

One of the first strikes of the cotton-factory operatives that ever took place in

this country was that in Lowell, in October, 1836. When it was announced that wages were to be cut down, great indignation was felt, and it was decided to strike, en masse. This was done. The mills were shut down, and the girls went in procession from their several corporations to the "grove" on Chapel Hill, and listened to "incendiary" speeches from early labor reformers.

One of the girls stood on a pump, and gave vent to the feelings of her companions in a neat speech, declaring that it was their duty to resist all attempts at cutting down the wages. This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience.

Cutting down the wages was not their only grievance, nor the only cause of this strike. Hitherto the corporations had paid twenty-five cents a week towards the board of each operative, and now it was their purpose to have the girls pay the sum; and this, in addition to the cut in wages, would make a difference of at least one dollar a week. It was estimated that as many as twelve or fifteen hundred girls turned out, and walked in procession through the streets. . . .

My own recollection of this first strike (or "turn out" as it was called) is very vivid: I worked in a lower room, where I had heard the proposed strike fully, if not vehemently, discussed; I had been an ardent listener to what was said against this attempt at "oppression" on the part of the corporation, and naturally I took sides with the strikers. When the day came on which the girls were to turn out, those in the upper rooms started first, and so many of them left that our mill was at once shut down. Then, when the girls in my room stood irresolute, uncertain what to do, asking each other, "Would you?" or "Shall we turn out?" and not one of them having the courage to lead off, I, who began to think they would not go out, after all their talk, became impatient, and started on ahead, saying, with childish bravado, "I don't care what you do, I am going to turn out, whether any one else does or not;" and I marched out, and was followed by the others.

As I looked back at the long line that followed me, I was more proud than I have ever been at any success I may have achieved.

. . .

In 1845, Margaret Fuller published the groundbreaking work *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, an expanded version of an essay she had written for *The Dial* in 1843, called "The Great Lawsuit—Man versus Men; Woman versus Women." The book, part of which is excerpted here, had a profound impact on the women's rights movement in the United States.

