

## D.B.Q.—19<sup>th</sup> Century Women at Work

This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents. Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with evidence from the documents.
- Uses all or all but one of the documents
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible.
- Take into account both the sources of the documents and the author's point of view.

You may refer to relevant historical information not mentioned in the documents.

**Question: Industrialization in the period 1750-1914 saw a large number of women in the work force. Based on the following documents, discuss the economic and social consequences for women and their families of their working. What kinds of additional documentation would help you better answer the question?**

### Document 1

A Chinese woman tells her story to an American Suffragette:

"I am fortunate to be here to tell my story. Not all third daughters of a poor farmer were permitted to live... Between what my mother could earn and what we could grow these were the best times for my family. Unhappily, everything turned to dust for us. The Taiping disturbances [Taiping Rebellion 1851-64]... cost money. We were crushed by additional taxes. We were forced to give up ownership of our little farm. Soon my mother lost her job as a spinner. Finally our luck changed. Chang Chien built the first privately owned textile mill in my hometown, and my mother and I were able to get the cotton jobs because of experience as spinners. I couldn't read, but when we came to work we were forced to sign this Factory Agreement which told us what we would be paid, how long we had to work and what would happen if we got sick. I sometimes feel sad to know that my family will never gain live on our own farm. Yet, I am happy to have a job. Combined with the wages of my mother and father we can survive and I can even hope to marry one of the other factory workers. My mother and I secretly confessed to each other our true feelings. We like the factory worker's life much better than the life of a woman on a farm. We are much freer working in the factory and less under the domination of the men of the family than we would ever have been on the farm. Our only fear is that if our factory can't sell its goods we may lose our jobs. We do not have the slightly greater security of farm life."

### Document 2

A mother of four responds to the passage of The Mines Act of 1842 in Britain which prohibited underground work for all women as well as boys under 10:

"While working in the pit I was worth to my [miner] husband seven shillings a week, out of which we had to pay 2 ½ shillings to a woman for looking after the younger children. I used to take them to her house at 4 o'clock in the morning, out of their own beds, to put them into hers."

(next page)

Then there was one shilling a week for washing; besides there was mending to pay for, and other things. The house was not guided. The other children broke things; they did not go to school when they were sent; they would be playing about, and get ill-used by other children, and their clothes torn. Then when I came home in the evening, everything was to do after the day's labor, and I was so tired I had no heart for it; no fire lit, nothing cooked, no water fetched, the house dirty, and nothing comfortable for my husband. It is all far better now, and I wouldn't go down again."

### Document 3

A Song sung by young women in the Japanese silk industry collected Patricia Tsurumi for her book *Factory Girls : Women in the Thread Mills of Meiji Japan*

#### The Prison Lament

Factory work is prison work,  
All its lacks are iron chains.

More than a caged bird, more than a prison,  
Dormitory life is hateful.

Like a horse or a cow,  
The reeler is fenced in.

Like the money, in my employment contract,  
I remain sealed away.

If a male worker makes eyes at you,  
You end up losing your shirt.

How I wish the dormitory would be washed away,  
The factory burn down,  
And the gatekeeper die of cholera!

At six in the morning I wear a devil's face,  
At six in the evening, a smiling face.

I want wings to escape from here,  
To fly as far as those distant shores.

Neither silk-reeling maids nor slops  
Are promoted or kept for long.

### Document 4

A Female Textile Worker in Germany writes in her journal of her working conditions, 1880's:  
"In the weaving sheds the girls work in an atmosphere which, on the third day of my work there, gave me bad lung catarrh [inflammation]; tiny flakes of the twisted wool fill the air, settle on dress and hair, and float into nose and mouth; the machines have to be swept clean every two hours; the dust is breathed in by the girls, since we are not allowed to open the windows. To this has to be added the terrible nerve-racking noise of the rattling machines so that no one can hear himself speak. It is only possible by shouting on the top of one's voice. The girls work hard, very hard, and quite a few told me how they collapsed with the exertion of the first four weeks of work. Add to this the poor, miserable food, the short periods of rest in rooms which don't deserve the name of 'dwelling' – and many remain cheerful, healthy, lively and enterprising. It is truly a miracle that so many girls still look fresh and blooming, and that they still feel like singing at work. Many girls work happily, particularly those weaving small carpets or curtains woven as one piece who can observe the building up of the pattern. They love their machines like loving a

faithful dog; they polish them, tie coloured ribbons, and all sorts of gaudy tinsel. . . to the crossbars. The work of the carpet weavers should not be underrated, it is anything but monotonous or repetitive. When working on a complex Turkish pattern, I have to concentrate, think, coordinate, calculate and pay attention. This work requires far more mental activity and sense of responsibility than the needlework done by hundreds of girls of the society in expectation of the shining knight who would one day come and rescue them."

### Document 5

Samuel Courtauld's Silk Mill workforce in 1860, Halstead, England:

Number	Weekly Wages	MALES
1	1000 pounds per year	Mill Manager (Also got 3 per cent of the profits)
26	15s-32s	Overseers and clerks
6	17s-25s	Mechanics and engine drivers
3	14s-21s	Carpenters and blacksmiths
1	15s	Lodgekeeper
16	14s-15s	Power loom machinery attendants and steamers
18	10s-15s	Mill machinery attendants and loom cleaners
5	5s-12s	Spindle cleaners, bobbin stampers and packers, messengers, sweepers
-	7s-10s	Watchmen
-	5s-10s	Coachmen, grooms and van driver
38	2s-4s	Winders
114		Total Males
Number	Weekly Wages	FEMALES
4	10s-11s	Gauze examiners
4	9s-10s	Female assistant overseers
16	7s-10s	Warpers
9	7s-10s	Twisters
4	6s-9s	Wasters
589	5s-8s	Weavers
2	6s-7s	Plugwinders
83	4s-6s	Drawers and doublers
188	2s-4s	Winders
899		Total Females
1013		GRAND TOTAL WORK FORCE

### Document 6

Factory Rules, 1924 Abramo Eberle Metalworks Management, Caxias do Sul, Brazil  
(workers rarely earned more than \$1 per day)

Article One

Oct. 1 to Feb. 28, work will start at 7:30 until 12, and at 1:15 until 6:15; March 1 to April 30 and August 1 to Sept. 30, 7:30 until 12 and 1:15 until 5:45, May 1 to July 31, 7:45 until 12, and 1:15 until

*(see next page)*

5: 15. Workers of both sexes will start and finish work in accord with the signals from the bell. Worker's entry into the factory is not permitted after the above hours, except with express permission from the foreman and by means of explanations . . . No worker can be absent from work without previous notice and , if lacking this, will be subject to the fine of [\$25] for the first time. . .

Article Two

No worker shall exit the factory, or the section in which he works without first asking permission from the foreman. . .

Article Three

It remains strictly prohibited: To sing, whistle, or talk during working hours, except in the line of service. In cases of infractions committed . . .the same fines included in Article One will be applied.

Article four

The use of latrines will be permitted, at the maximum, three times per day . . . .

### Document 7

Women in World History, 1500 to the Present. Written by American historians, Sarah and Brady Hughes in 1997.

By 1914, carpets were Iran's largest export. As in other textile industries throughout the world, the modern carpet industry depended upon female labor. Factories were not mechanized...technology found no substitute for human fingers to tie knots in piled carpets. Costs were reduced by replacing independent female artisans who created their own patterns with harshly exploited children, poor women, and occasionally, men. The factories were often distant from the traditional carpet-producing areas. Social demands for seclusion created problems for adult women workers. Economic necessity drove poor Muslim women into shameful public employment. Working conditions were harsh. To keep the threads from breaking, the preferred work space was damp and dark, and the hours were as long as the managers could keep the workers awake on the looms. After 1900, Christian medical missionaries began reporting deformities among the children and you women: gnarled fingers, hands, wrists, and arms, as well as legs too crippled to walk. . . . .