



Section 3

PRIMARY SOURCE

“Life in a New England Factory”

from *Voice of Industry*, June 26, 1845

The Voice of Industry was one of the most widely read American labor papers of the 1840s. The article from which this excerpt was taken called for a 10-hour workday, part of the reform movement aimed at improving working conditions. Which arguments do you think are most persuasive?

During the last winter a petition was presented to the Legislature of Massachusetts, by eight hundred and fifty “peacable, industrious and hard-working men and women,” declaring that they are confined from thirteen to fourteen hours per day in unhealthy apartments, and are hastening through pain, disease, privation, down to a premature grave, and praying the State to inquire into their condition and to restrict the number of hours of labor in Factories to ten per day,—This, and other similar petitions, were signed by two thousand one hundred and thirty-nine persons, chiefly females.

The operatives in England are prohibited, by act of Parliament, from being employed more than at a rate of eleven and a half hours per day. . . .

The operatives in Lowell work

In January,	11 hours 24 min.
In February,	12 hours
In March,	11 hours 52 min.
In April,	13 hours 31 min.
In May,	12 hours 55 min.
In June,	12 hours 45 min.
In July,	12 hours 45 min.
In August,	12 hours 45 min.
In September,	12 hours 43 min.
In October,	12 hours 16 min.
In November,	11 hours 46 min.
In December,	11 hours 24 min.

To this must be added in each instance thirty minutes, at least, for going to and from the mill, at morning and evening. They go to and return from breakfast in thirty minutes, to and from dinner in thirty minutes, for about eight months in a year; and the other four months they are allowed forty-five minutes.

. . . A woman in a Factory in New England, works one hour and some minutes longer, every day in the year, than a woman in a British Factory—They are allowed four days as holidays; the English are allowed six.

First it must be apparent that the hours allowed for labor are too many.

Second, that the minutes allowed for them to take their food are too few.

Third, that these causes are sufficient to impair health, induce disease, premature old age, and death.

Fourth, that these causes, . . . acting upon so large a number of females assembled in the manufactories of New England, must in time affect the physical condition of the people of New England.

Fifthly, that no reason can be given why these evils should not produce the same terrible effects here, as in England, where their full results are developed.

Sixth, that as the British Parliament, from motives of humanity have been compelled to interfere in behalf of the operatives, prudence and mercy call upon our legislators to do likewise.

Seventh, that the example of this State would be followed at once throughout New England.

from *Voice of Industry*, June 26, 1845. Reprinted in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Factory Girls* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 218–219.

Activity Options

Making Judgments

1. Which arguments given in this article for the 10-hour workday do you think are most persuasive? Rank each of them on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being least persuasive and 5 being most persuasive. Then compare your rankings with those of your classmates.
2. Despite workers’ efforts, the Massachusetts’ state legislature did not pass legislation for a 10-hour workday. Discuss with classmates why you think this legislation was defeated.