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Women at Work in Connecticut:1880-1920

Curriculum Unit 81.ch.07
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Contents of Curriculum Unit 81.ch.07:

In 1977 the average woman could expect to spend 27.6 years of her life in the work force, compared with 38.3 years for men.

Women workers are concentrated in low paying dead end jobs. As a result, the average woman worker earns only about three-fifths of what a man does, even when both work full time year round.

Fully employed women high school graduates (with no college) had less income on the average than fully employed men who had not completed elementary school in 1978. Women with four years of college also had less income than men with only an 8th grade education.

Women were 80 percent of all clerical workers in 1979 but only 6 percent of all craft workers; 62 percent of service

> workers but only 43 percent of professional and technical workers; and 63 percent of retail sales workers but only 25 percent of non-farm managers and administrators.
>
> U.S. Department of Labor, “20 Facts on Women Workers,” 1980.

Almost all students we teach will work at a paying job at some point in their lives. Half of them, however, are doomed by their sex to low-paying dead end jobs.

How did women inherit this inferior position in the United States work place? Has it always been this way? Has their position improved since the country industrialized at the turn of the century? Do male or female workers have control over the types of jobs they get and the working conditions they find there?

Though most American women have always been relegated to low-level, subservient jobs in and out of the home, many have been able to exercise varying degrees of choice in their work lives. Between 1880 and 1920 the choices available to women expanded due to the change in job definition, technology, the production pressures of World War I, the growing militancy of women workers riding the tide of labor unrest during the war, and the increased acceptance of women in the work force.

The period of 1880 to 1920 is of particular importance in our economic history because the structure of our present economic world developed at that time. Many new jobs were stereotyped by sex, while many job opportunities opened up for small numbers of women in various formerly all-male fields. In studying this material, students will begin to understand the historical limits society has placed on their job choice, end learn that with some individual initiative it is possible to break out of societally determined gender roles which can limit a person’s ability to develop her best capabilities.

Rationale

The materials in this two week unit planned for eleventh graders focus on the lives of ordinary working women in the United States as a whole, and specifically in Connecticut, and how they responded to the changing industrial world. Traditional high school U.S. history texts skim lightly over the real world of most people in our past by focusing on military, political, and diplomatic history. That history, which deals with official actions and institutional behavior, necessarily omits ordinary women, for they never played a meaningful part in any of these areas. Thus women have been systematically excluded from the history our students learn. Use of the primary and secondary resources included here will allow you to integrate into your unit on industrialization ordinary workers’ reactions to this complicated process with a focus on the relationship between women workers and economic and technological change, 1880 to 1920.

It is important for students to realize that though women and men have lived in the same country, they have not experienced history in the same way. They should know that, according to the best contemporary scholarship, this different historical experience is based on socially constructed inequalities rather than divinely or naturally ordained roles. The case for social or natural origins will develop from study of the past. Such study will also lead to the discovery of the wide individual variation in what have become stereotyped roles. History should portray the limiting constructs which have impeded women’s power and autonomy and point the way toward equality.

This unit attempts to pose a balance between emphasizing the strengths and accomplishments of women in the past, and the disabilities and constraints suffered by them. Through this analysis, it will become clear that women's individual and collective ability to act has been successful in certain areas, but has been stymied in others by the constructs of the larger society.

A focus on the years between 1880 and 1920 in the United States and Connecticut gives us a time when women's roles were changing not only in the labor force, but in other realms as well: in politics in the fight for suffrage, and in the family in the struggle for access to birth control. Most importantly, it provides a way to integrate women into the U.S. history curriculum in a subject area that most teachers teach.

Women in the Work Force Before 1880

Work is the dominant form of human experience. Our work helps determine self-image, our interaction with others, and can provide meaning in our lives. Human labor is essential in determining our economic and cultural survival. The forms work takes have changed drastically through the years with changing technology and the changing organizational patterns at the work place.

Until the American Revolution, at least ninety percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas and farmed. Everyone pitched in to provide for the family needs, but there was a sharp division of labor by gender. This division of labor is as old as human history.

Women's work was diverse and endless. They looked after the cleanliness of the house, made, mended and washed the clothes, prepared meals on the open fire, preserved foods, made soap, candles, and most medicines well into the 19th century, and also helped the men in the fields at planting and harvesting time. On top of this, they would bear and rear an average of six children. The colonial woman was by no means a dainty or weak creature.

With the rise of industrialization at the beginning of the 19th century, and the flowering of capitalism, labor began to be viewed as a product which could be bought and sold at the marketplace. This change established a new hierarchy for work between paid and unpaid labor because for the first time large numbers of men and some women began to work for wages outside the home. Some of the products women had produced in the home were now produced in factories. Families grew dependent on wages to buy these necessary products. As families grew dependent on wages, the value of housework and child rearing were denigrated in the money economy. But, by the early 1800s, though many working class women worked outside the home, there was a clear acceptance by middle class society that woman's place was in the home, where work had less value.

In the early 19th century, textile mills in New England provided the first opportunity for large numbers of women to work outside the home in non-domestic labor. Until the 1830s many women between sixteen and twenty-one lived with other families as servants and nursemaids to save money for a dowry before marriage. The opening of the textile mills provided an option for single women which many chose. Though closely supervised at the mills, the women were independent of family; they made more money; and they worked shorter hours. For employers, they provided a cheaper source of labor than men. Until the first immigrant wave of Irish in the late 1830s, it was respectable for native born white single women to work in these factories. However, it was always understood that they would return to domestic pursuits after marriage.

The immigrants changed the nature of the work force, while at the same time new technologies changed the types of jobs they performed. Mills became more structured and time-oriented, machines spun faster determining the pace of production, and employment was no longer seasonal. The Irish women saw factory work as a permanent job and so had a different outlook on their position.

Even though by 1850, white women, including immigrants, worked in 175 different occupations in the U.S., the great majority of non-farm laborers were found in two extensions of traditional women's work: domestic service, and manufacture of clothing and processing of food. (The great majority of black women in the U.S. were still in slavery.) Of the total one million laborers who worked in factories, twenty-five percent were women. In New England, about one-third were women, with Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island in the forefront. [1]

Middle class women were bound to their culturally defined "proper sphere" at home. They saw respectability only in such jobs as teaching and nursing and felt working class women were involved in activities inherently lacking in virtue and purity. Working class women saw their worth degraded even more when they discovered their wages were one-fourth to one-third those of working men doing the same jobs.

In 1880, the largest number of wage-earning women in the U.S. were employed in manufacturing and domestic work. In the factories they were concentrated in the production of clothing, boots and shoes, and food processing. Wage labor outside the home was sanctioned to a certain degree if it was merely a continuation of work within women's sphere. The second largest group of women worked as domestics in private homes, a continuation of work they had always done. Working as a servant, however, had little prestige and less attraction. As Charlotte Holloway, Connecticut's industrial investigator found in 1916:

> No matter what euphonious title of "mother's helper" or what other form we disguise it, the cold fact is that there is a relation of one woman submitting to another and the feeling of independence is chafing at such social distinction. [3]

Even so, there were so few good jobs open to women in 1880 that many had no choice but to enter domestic service. If women did have an alternative, they grabbed it and as the 20th century dawned, new options did open due to economic and technological change.

For black women, employment opportunities were even fewer. Though a black woman was at least twice as likely to work, and worked for more years than a white woman, most were consigned to domestic and agricultural work. In Connecticut, many black women worked in the tobacco fields, but few were allowed in the factories. [4]

Historically, then, women have had limited opportunities in the work force. Although as far back as the farm girls working in the Lowell mills in the 1830s, there are records of job actions for better pay and improved working conditions, there are few examples of sustained labor organization before 1910. There were four factors which made organization for women difficult:

1. their youth and the temporary nature of most women's careers;
2. the tendency of gender discrimination in job choice creating an overabundance of women in those occupations available;
3. the concentration in the unorganized fields of agriculture, domestic and personal service,

trade, and clerical service; and
4. the open hostility of many male dominated craft unions.

Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 2Oth century, women began to use their bargaining power collectively with some degree of effectiveness. [5]

In the late 19th century, most, though not all, middle class women believed that something was wrong if a woman was working outside the home after she was married. With the emerging reform movements, small numbers of educated women entered the professions. Before marriage it was acceptable to become a teacher, but almost any other job was seen as endangering the moral virtue and delicacy of the proper "lady." In reality, a great number of women worked, made choices open to them, and survived in the work place. Because production had moved out of the home, and more Americans became part of a money economy, women and children were forced to work because laboring men could not support their families on wages. The majority of these women had to work at monotonous, low paid, dead end jobs during the day, go home in the evening and take care of the meals, housekeeping duties, and child rearing, while being condemned by society for losing their virtue by going out to work every day.

Women's Changing Role Between 1880 and 1920

Though the percentage of women workers in the paid labor force in Connecticut only rose from 23.7 percent to 26.3 percent between 1880 and 1920, the total number of women working tripled, while the state population did little more than double. [6] Society began to accept the fact that single women could and should work, and could do so without ruining their reputations. The increase in the number of women workers however, is not nearly as significant as the shift in occupations, which, however, left unchanged the low status of women in the work force.

Throughout the period, the proportion of women working in the paid labor force in Connecticut was greater than in the U.S. as a whole. And, because Connecticut was such a strong manufacturing state, more women worked in manufacturing and fewer in agriculture than elsewhere. In 1910 Connecticut was the leading producer of firearms and ammunition in the U.S.; produced almost half of the brass, bronze and silverware products; and produced the more value in clocks and watches than any other state. [7] The attached charts give a detailed outline of the changes in employment during this period.

The most notable change is the shift out of domestic work, into clerical work. The percentage of women in manufacturing and agriculture gradually decreased. There is a dramatic *decrease* in percentage and numbers in the domestic area, and an even more dramatic *increase* for women in the clerical field. Trade and transportation, and professional and public service show moderate increases.

What happened to cause the opening of this new field—clerical work? Why does the percentage of women in manufacturing drop? And what does the sharp decrease in domestics tell us about women's ability to make

choices in the work place?

ACTIVITY ONE: Drawing Conclusions from Census Figures

This lesson will allow students to define the role of women in the work force from 1880 to 1920 in numbers, in relationship to a growing population, by employment in various sectors, and through observing their shift from one sector to another. They should understand that though this was a period of great change in our economy, and women did shift employment sectors, their status as workers showed only small changes. Women still were allowed in jobs which held little or no change for advancement.

The two pages below include the tables and questions needed to carry out this lesson.

(figure available in print form)

(figure available in print form)

Dilution of Craft Changing Technology

The types of jobs workers held, and their relationship with their employer changed substantially through the turmoil of the years 1880 to 1920. The control of production slipped out of the hands of skilled workers and into the hands of supervisors who regulated the new machines. The all around skilled craftsman, trained by a union apprenticeship and able to work in any area of the trade without management instruction and supervision, was replaced by the semi-skilled machine operative trained by the company to work on a few tasks using modified and specialized machinery. These technologically advanced machines divided the skill of the craftworker into many different parts which a mere machine tender could perform. The new premium was on swiftness and endurance rather than versatility, judgement, and expertise. Women were able to enter new areas of manufacturing due to this change, while the skilled craftsmen desperately tried to hold on to their power in the work place.

In the economy as a whole, there was an unprecedented increase in the amount of goods produced as mass production and mass distribution became facts of daily life. There was an equally remarkable amount of consolidation of this production from individually owned businesses into large corporate holdings. In Connecticut by 1919, corporations owned 38.3 percent of the total number of establishments and this 38.3 percent employed 94.2 percent of all wage earners. These corporations controlled 93.9 percent of the total value of products made in Connecticut. While the number of wage earners increased 20.3 percent over this period, the value of products increased 162.1 percent. Clearly, new methods of organization allowed for larger and fewer establishments, placing control in the hands of a very powerful minority. [8]

In Connecticut, this process was accelerated by the outbreak of World War I. Connecticut produced fifty-five percent of the munitions used by the U.S. in the war as well as a large share of other war supplies. As early as August of 1914, two Hartford factories received orders for munitions from Canada. The contracts to these two concerns caused a boom for the five or six companies who either directly or indirectly received work from these orders. In 1915, Colt’s Patent Fire Arms Company received over $30 million in ammunition contracts

from France and Britain. By the end of June, 1915, Colt had to double its plant size to fill the orders for its machine guns. The gearing up of the United States' own war machine increased Colt's output. From a pre-war work force of 750, Colt's payroll increased to 6500 workers by mid-1918. [9]

Connecticut was experiencing the most prosperous era of her modern history and there was hope for industrial employers and employees alike that the prosperity and the war would continue. Manufacturers not only expanded their facilities, but were compelled constantly to increase production efficiency and rationalization. [10] They introduced new techniques and procedures, increasingly segmented labor processes, and revamped the management and organization of their factories to meet the demands. Time and motion experts were in great demand. [11] These new divisions of labor, caused by the dilution of trade, based on scientific work-time studies allowed the introduction of women and unskilled men into new areas of the metal trades. These new jobs were clearly sex-segregated, but did provide opportunities for women workers which caused shifts away from traditional women's employment. They were by no means skilled positions. Women received special training and paternalistic supervision, and were often acclaimed by managers as docile and hardworking. [12] Even though there was a perception that women both in Connecticut and the U.S. were flocking to industry, a comparison of the percentage of women to men employed in manufacturing actually showed a decrease over the decade. [13] This decrease was due to the larger influx of men into the work force, and the growth of heavy industry, still wholly reserved to men.

During World War I, women's importance in the industrial world actually diminished. Of course, just as in the 1970s and 1980s, every time a woman entered an occupation sanctioned for generations as a pursuit for men only, attention was called to the fact by the woman's co-workers and in some cases by the press. In Connecticut, a "Survey of Opportunities for Women in Industry" was conducted by the state Council of Defense. A Department of Women in Industry was established in the state which, through the U.S. Employment service in Connecticut, helped recruit women for government contract work in factories. The Department paraded before the press a series of photographs to show the wonders of women working in previously all-male industries. The publicity given these changes in the occupational status of women caused the public to believe that a large and increasing proportion of women were seeking employment outside the home. When a woman dropped out of domestic service or gave up dressmaking or came in from the tobacco fields to work in a munitions factory or to become a street-car conductor, the entire community heard of her new employment, but no one recognized that she was only moving from one occupation to another; the belief that vast numbers of women were entering the paid work force was just not true. [14] So, even though the number of women working in factories increased, industry had expanded even more quickly, and proportionately more men entered these jobs than women.

Between 1910 and 1920, Connecticut experienced a 19.9 percent growth in the number of women employed with a concurrent population increase of 23.9 percent, and a growth of 19.8 percent in the entire work force. One contributing factor to the seemingly low work force growth rates compared to general population is that by the time the 1920 Census was taken, many employers had laid off employees due to the end of the war and the loss of government contracts. However, it is clear that the increased number of women in the work force did not expand disproportionately with the growth in population. It is also true that the women workers did not take over many skilled or high paying "male jobs."

ACTIVITY TWO: INTERPRETING PHOTOGRAPHS

Through the use of photographs of women in the work place in Connecticut during World War I, students will interpret what work was like and project changes in the work place over the past sixty years. These pictures are from the Connecticut State Library Collection “Pictures of Women in Industry” located in Record Group 20, Box 46. Questions follow.

Study the eight photographs taken of women working during World War I. Then answer the following questions.

1. Are there any examples of men and women working together? In which picture(s)?
2. What would you say is the average age of the workers?
3. What sex are the supervisors in the pictures?
4. What evidence is there that there is a patriotic fever in the air?
5. Do the jobs these women are doing look safe? Proof?
6. Do the jobs look like they would take a good deal of skill to perform? Evidence either way?
7. What evidence is there of the pace at which the women worked?
8. What are examples of women working in jobs not ordinarily expected of women?
9. The pictures were publicity photos taken for the newspapers. What about the pictures makes the work look interesting?
10. What do you see in these pictures that might make you feel uncomfortable at the job?
11. If you were a photographer in 1981 trying to shoot some publicity photos to get women working in factories and nontraditional jobs, what sequence of 3 pictures would you take?

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Manufacturing

Many believe that women's status in the work place improved dramatically during World War I. Due to war time propaganda and the impressive occupational gains made by women during World War lI, many have assumed that the same circumstances advanced employment opportunities for women during the previous world war in s lasting way. However, even though women were able to shift employment sectors, their status as workers in the post World War I decade showed little improvement from the pre-war years.

Throughout the years surrounding World War I, more women worked in manufacturing than in any other employment sector. Though the proportion of women in manufacturing declined over the period, they were able to enter jobs never before open to them. In fact, the government's urgent call to Americans to release people for "more necessary employment" may have led to a sanctioned stigma on domestic and personal service as nonessential work. There had always been a higher esteem placed on factory work with its clearly defined hours than domestic work. But government action probably introduced women who lacked the initiative to try new kinds of work to the factories and white collar jobs which, as individuals they might well never have undertaken. Yet, they found themselves very capable of doing these jobs as they were often more interesting and at higher pay and improved working conditions than their domestic work. [15]

Even middle class feminists of the era jumped on the bandwagon and articulated their perceptions of paying jobs as a form of emancipation from men. Particularly revered were the women in factories who had broken out of the constraints of domesticity into paying work as hard as any man's. Work, according to these middle class reformers took away much of the stereotyping of "weak women." [16] It was a way to show independence and strength. However, when a prominent feminist journalist and active advocate of women's work, Rheta Childe Dorr, went to work in a factory, she found the workers had certainly not been liberated by their work.

> Instead of independence, she had found meek girls docilely handing over their wages to their fathers. Most disturbing of all, factory girls, with their romantic visions and their hearts set on marriage, seemed anxious to get out of work as she herself, deserting a wealthy husband, had been desperate to get into it. [17]

While for some it did provide independence, for others work only institutionalized their dependence on men. On the other hand, Dorr was also shocked by strikers' riots and physical fighting among the working women. Perhaps she saw both resulting from the degradation of the worker, both male and female.

The number of women factory workers in Connecticut grew from 26,865 to 60,350 between 1880 and 1920, an increase of 124.6 percent. The increase of women in the work world was 200.5 percent for the same period, showing that though there was an expansion of the numbers of women in manufacturing, they by no means kept up with the growth of all women at work, or men in the manufacturing sector. The population grew 144 percent while the number of male workers increased by 130 percent.

Whereas in 1910 the largest number of women were employed in corset, cotton, and silk factories, by 1920 there were as many women doing semiskilled work in the machine shops. A great number of these jobs were in Connecticut's munitions plants where women had been working for years, but had just begun to get public attention. Remington Arms and Munition and Remington Union Metallic Company of Bridgeport, the Winchester Repeating Arms Company and Merlin-Rockwell Company of New Haven, and Colt's Patent Firearms Company of Hartford were the five main munitions factories in Connecticut. When the state began to tool up for the war effort between 1914 and 1915, as the Germans marched west through Belgium and France, a

large number of other factories adapted their metal shops to the manufacture of shells, bombs, parts of ammunition, and rifles. [18] The number of women working in iron and steel more than doubled. A "Report of Wage Earning Women and Girls" published in 1918 described the semi-skilled jobs women were able to take.

> The correct eye, swift and nimble fingers and adaptability of women as well as the fact that they worked for less wages caused them to be employed in great numbers. In much of the work, no special skill beyond manipulation was required, the skilled being placed in rooms where the more delicate mechanism was constructed and the unskilled filling the benches where hundreds of foreigners who had never been employed in any such labor were soon made passably efficient through instructions. [19]

Due to the dearth of skilled women and the need to expand production quickly, the munitions industry replaced skilled with semi- and un-skilled workers with the introduction of new technology. Many women workers, previously working in stores or as domestics flocked to the metal trades. Their move was influenced by higher wages as well as the enthusiasm for the war effort in a desire to relieve or equip a man for service. [20]

As more and more war contracts came in, the factories had to be flexible in their employment patterns to get the necessary number of workers. Women were allowed to form into teams; one woman working the first half of the week and another working the second. Arrangements were made for women to come into factories for piecework to fit the available hours of the workers. School teachers were known to put in hours in the late afternoon. In times of economic necessity workers had increased bargaining power, and they used it.

Some of the women worked because of patriotic duty, others for the economic necessity, and still others for extra spending money. But, unlike today with high unemployment, the employer had to cater to his workers' needs to keep those he could get. As Corinne Barker writes,

> Even in 1914-1915 several hundred young married women were working in munitions plants . . . In many instances the home was neglected. In order to allow these mothers to work, nurseries were provided in many of the factories where professional nurses were employed to care for the children. The mother brought the child or children to the nursery when she came to work. The child was immediately put into clean clothes furnished by the factory, cared for, and amused all day until the mother was ready to go home. [21]

The women polished the small metal parts of the guns, drilled holes in the receiver, inspected the rough parts as well as the finished product. According to Barker, all factories employed women in shops (separated by sex), offices and as purchasing agents.

Even though a smaller proportion of workers were employed in manufacturing in 1920 than in 1910, the munitions factories and their workers in many ways controlled the total work picture. The munitions factories supported a large number of subsidiary rubber, electrical, leather, and metal manufacturers, giving rise to a more widespread prosperity in the state. Jewell Belting Company converted their machinery to make two million bayonet scabbards to equip soldiers for hand-to-hand combat in the war, one million gun slings, and thousands of belts for munitions plants. Their employees were about ninety percent men. In 1917 there were 225 workers. By 1919, Jewell employed 500 people. Hartford Rubber Works produced 55,000 gas masks to combat the use of this new, dangerous, but effective weapon, 5,000 pair of high rubber boots, and 5,000 tires for the war effort. And, in their advertising campaign for workers, they "secured many teachers, insurance girls, and bank girls." [22] The women and men wage earners who were in such great demand in these expanding industries caused other employers to raise wages to levels commensurate with those of munitions

factories to retain their workers. Domestics and those in personal service left their jobs with no one to fill them.

ACTIVITY THREE: INTERPRETING A POLITICAL CARTOON

Through the use of a political cartoon, the students will discover that many white males reacted with outrage at the employment of women and blacks. Men felt they were losing the power of their craft through the dilution of trade, and that women and blacks were infringing on their rights as workers because of the economic pressures of war-time production. The cartoon with accompanying questions follows.

(figure available in print form)

Greenwald, Maurine Wiooer, *Women, War, and Work.* Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1980, p. 122. Reprinted with permission.

1. There are 3 people in the cartoon. Who do they each represent?
2. Where is “War” taking the other two?
3. What are 3 things “War” is disregarding (by stepping on them) in bringing women and blacks into the work force?
4. For what reason did “War” bring women and blacks into the work force?
5. Do you think the cartoonist believed women and blacks would be brought into the work force?
6. How does the entrance of women and blacks hurt the position of the white male?
7. According to the statistics, do you think that the women and blacks directly hurt the position of the white male in the work force? Why or why not? Are there any other contributing factors?

Domestics

The really significant result of the change in employment status during World War I was a change in the distribution of women among the various occupations. In Connecticut, the dramatic change was the decrease in the number of women working as domestics or in personal service. The number of clerks rose 12.4 percent, while the number involved in Domestic and Personal Service, as defined by the Census Bureau, declined 11.8 percent. Domestics included not only servants, waitresses, and laundresses, but also a large number of midwives and untrained nurses, and boarding and lodging housekeepers. The number of women in each of

these areas, except midwives and untrained nurses, declined between 1910 and 1920. In Hartford, domestics were the second largest wage group behind manufacturing from 1880 to 1910. In the United States, Domestic and Personal Service had the largest number of women employed in both 1910 and 1920, though there was a sharp decrease during the decade.

There are a number of reasons for the large decline in domestic workers, not the least of which is higher wages in other areas, particularly with the labor shortage during the war years. Some conclude that the introduction of new labor-saving devices such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and electric irons were the causes of the decline in domestics. But as late as 1920, only a third of the nation's homes were wired for electricity and fewer than a third of those had a washing machine or vacuum cleaner. Electric irons had only been introduced in mail order catalogues in 1912. [23]

While wages were higher in other sectors of the economy, pulling the low paid domestics away from their work, pay for housework had to increase as well. This increase made domestic help too expensive for many families that had formerly been able to afford servants. During the war the number of immigrants, whose first jobs were often as domestics, declined drastically. Most importantly, those women who were able, opted out of this subservient work when given the choice as the census data shows.

Blacks comprised less than two percent of the Connecticut population before 1920. The World War I period saw the first large migration of blacks north to Connecticut, but their impact on Connecticut was minimal at that point. It is clear the blacks did experience much discrimination in job choice. In the nation in 1910, ninety-five percent of all black women worked either in agricultural or domestic work. In Connecticut blacks were recruited to work in the tobacco fields. As white and immigrant women left domestic work for better pay elsewhere, black women took up the slack. In 1910, 54.7 percent of native born whites and 21.7 percent of foreign born women were in the paid labor force. [24] Blacks in Hartford were not readily hired in the munitions factories (except as custodians) even with the labor shortage.

Clerical Work

While the industrial output of the country grew and consolidated so rapidly in the late 19th and early 2Oth centuries, business operations became more complex. With this expansion came a growing need to correspond, keep records, and manage offices to a degree never before imagined, thus creating a demand for an expanded clerical labor force. [25] In 1890 in Connecticut twice as many females graduated from high school than males. Up until this time, the only acceptable job for these women was teaching. There was then, a large literate pool of workers just waiting to be tapped.

The expansion of the clerical work force was marked by an increasing proportion of females and a decrease in pay and status for the work. At first, clerical work attracted women because it paid better than other jobs open to them. In 1900, clerical employees averaged more than twice the average annual earnings of other workers in the same industry. [26] In the early stages a clerical job required the skill to keep complete records of all the finance and operations of a huge enterprise. Bookkeepers or chief clerks maintained control over the entire process; but with the rise of the modern corporation these tasks were divided into jobs with little skill needed in the various departments of the business. Clerical jobs were divided into smaller and smaller tasks, with less and less skill needed.

Many women took up clerical work, making clerks the second largest female occupation in 1920. In Hartford, due to the growth of the insurance industries, particularly during the war, the number of clerks grew four-fold between 1910 and 1920. Clerks increased their share of the Connecticut work force from 9.1 percent, 10,929 workers, to 21.5 percent with 31,506 workers. In the nation the percentage of female clerical workers grew from 7.3 percent in 1910 to 16.7 percent in 1920. [27]

It was still not an easy transition for many companies to make. At Aetna Life and Casualty in Hartford it was not until 1910 that the first women were hired as clerks to put the company's records of mortality experience onto a holleith card file. The women were segregated on the sixth floor and used the rear elevators. In 1913, three women were hired for regular clerical positions. Then, during World War I, women were introduced more generally into the work force of the home office. [28]

At the Hartford Fire Insurance Company the salary book of 1903 to 1921 shows that two women were hired as early as 1892 and two more were hired in 1903. Until 1918, when women were hired in larger numbers, the women were listed separately from men. One woman, hired in 1894 and who worked until 1912, finally reached a salary of $100 per month. Another woman hired in 1907 for $60 a month was increased to $110 a month when she resigned in 1920. Women's salaries in 1913 ranged from $35 to $100 per month while men's ranged from $30 to $500 per month. It is clear from the roster that married women did work, and that many of the women worked more years than was typically expected.

Typewriters facilitated the entrance of women into the clerical work force. Typing, a sex-neutral job because it was new, was soon considered "women's work." In 1890, 63.8 percent of the stenographers and typists were women. By 1900 the proportion had risen to 76.7 percent. Women also worked at addressographs, adding, punching, and duplicating machines. Thus, by World War I, women office workers were accepted. Their image in the office had turned from "frivolous creatures incapable of doing an honest day's work" and as "risking her morality" if she invaded the male preserve of the office, to "well-suited for office work because they were tolerant of routine, careful and manually dextrous," with the emotional attributes of sympathy, adaptability, and courtesy. [29] Secretaries began to be equated with wives.

> Their conscious or subconscious willingness to be directed by men render them amenable and obedient and relieves them of the ambition which makes it difficult for men to put their devotion into secretarial work.

A definite parallel can be made with the large scale production of the factories which utilized more specialized machines, and thus required less and less skill and strength with a resultant increase in women employees. Industrial efficiency experts applied their methods to deal with the growing mountains of paperwork until:

> Arranged behind banks of desks, strictly supervised, paid at times like industrial workers on piece work, many of the new clerical workers differed from factory hands only in status and neatness— just as the turn-of-the-century department stores employing several thousand saleswomen and cash girls differed little from fair-sized industrial establishments. [31]

The entrance of women into clerical jobs only reinforced attitudes outside the office where men held positions of power. As in most other work places of the 1910 to 1920 decade(and of today) the division of work into less and less skilled jobs offered a way into the work force for women. But it also promoted the continued control of masses of clerical and factory workers by a small group of managers, almost always men. The ideology that women, by virtue of their "feminine docility" were naturally suited to fill low level jobs made it difficult for them to get well-paying jobs and act independently.

In fact it was very difficult for most women to do anything more than survive financially. They were able to do little more than pay for board, car-fare, and food. Most all had to continue to sew their own clothes and only a small minority were able to save. In 1910, median wages for women in five Connecticut industries ranged from $5.46 to $7.20 per week with an average fifty-two to sixty hour work week, depending on the season. In 1913, median wages ranged from $7.56 in rubber to $9.57 in cotton factories. The median for munitions workers was $10.57. By 1917, many states had established an "irreducible minimum of pay for physical, mental, and moral well being." They ranged from $8.64 to $8.90 per week. [32]

Though the stereotype remained that many women were working only for "pin money," interviews with workers make it obvious that most women worked then, as now, out of economic necessity. Even though it was still not accepted by white middle class society, 21.9 percent of the women working in the corset industry in 1914 were married.

The chart below confirms the fact that it was much more acceptable and necessary for immigrant married women to work than American born

(figure available in print form)

Between 1914 and 1920 prices rose sharply due to wartime scarcities. In 1920, an $8.00 per week salary, an average for a salesperson in a store, or a clerk, could purchase about $3.93 worth of 1914 goods. So, even though wages in the lower grade (under $10) rose between 200 and 250 percent, the standard of living for most did not show great improvement. [34] Wages for women also remained at lower rates than men.

ACTIVITY 4: INTERVIEWS WITH WORKING WOMEN, 1914

The best way to learn what work was really like is to listen to the women describe their daily activities. After reading the interviews in this activity, lead a discussion which will allow the students to draw some conclusions about the conditions of the women. They should see that according to those interviewed:

1. Women worked due to economic necessity for the most part.
2. There was almost always more than one wage-earner in the household.
3. Wages were so low that few could save, or have extra money for leisure time.
4. Women felt afraid that they could easily lose a job by complaining to their employer, but were unafraid of complaining to the interviewer.
5. Not all women felt the same way about their job.

Then have students conjecture what results an interviewer would have taking a similar survey in 1981. Would the workers have the same reactions to working conditions, pay, employers, and family relations? What would be the similarities and differences?

(figure available in print form)

Many of these working women did much more than complain to the interviewer. A long period of economic uncertainty ended in 1914. With the coming of war contracts, all wage-earners became more confident as they found themselves in demand. In the U.S. during the World War I years more than a million workers struck, more than had ever struck in any years before 1915. The soaring cost of food and the unavailability of some goods led to a growing militancy among workers. The decade following 1910 was the decisive one in winning the eight hour day, something American workers had been fighting for since the 1860s. At the beginning of the decade only eight percent of the country's workers had regular schedules of forty-eight hours or less. Almost seventy percent had the forty-eight hour week, and less than twenty-six percent worked more than fifty-four hours. [35]

Women were the main participants in at least fifteen strikes in Hartford between 1913 and 1919. Their demands were for both improved pay and working conditions. In Hartford there was a total of eighty-two strikes. Fourteen percent were successful. An equal number were partially successful and a full sixty-six percent of the strikes ended with no gain at all.

*NUMBER OF STRIKES IN HARTFORD AND CONNECTICUT**

YEARS	*HARTFORD*	*CONNECTICUT*
1913-1914	5	45
1915-1916	33	422
1917-1918	18	183
1919-1920	*26*	*280*
TOTAL	82	930

*Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Condition of Wage Earners* . 1914, 1916, 1918, and 1920.

As early as 1913, 150 garment workers, mostly women, at the Davidson and Watts Company in Hartford went on strike for eight days, demanding shorter hours. They lost. On May 13, 1916, sixty shirtwaist makers at the Max Roth Company stayed out for twenty days demanding only a half day on Saturday, but with full pay. They were unsuccessful. Two days later, eleven women at the Elite Waist Company struck for the same reason and got the same result. Twenty-seven garment workers at Lippman Brothers and Sons struck for reinstatement of an employee in September, 1916. They also lost.

Cap makers striking the Hartford Cap and Hat Company were the first group of women during this period to be successful. The seventeen women who went on strike for six days in 1916 won reduced hours from fifty-three to forty-nine per week with a ten percent increase in pay. These same women struck Hartford Hat twenty months later and won another twenty percent increase in pay.

By January, 1919 the Armistice was signed and the government contracts were stopped. The economy began a slump that left many unemployed. However, in January, seventy-one waistmakers from four different companies struck for higher wages, fewer hours, and a closed shop. At the Connecticut Silk Waist Factory the women who were out for fifteen days won a reduction in hours from forty-nine to forty-seven a week. At the

Frank Lamar Company where eight people went out in a sympathy strike, they were all replaced. Ten workers at the Herman Levy Company held out for fifty-nine days in sympathy and were replaced. These women were well organized enough to stay out for long periods and were able to show concern for others outside their own work place. They must have suffered extremely poor working conditions to take such a risk. Perhaps if the strikes had occurred six months earlier, it would not have been so easy for employers to find scabs to replace the workers.

Finally, in September of 1919, 100 seamstresses at all of the major department stores in Hartford went on strike. Those at G. Fox, Brown Thompson, and Sage Allen walked out with a demand for higher pay. Fifty garment workers at other department stores struck for a fifty percent increase in pay and a forty-four hour week. They followed the lead of 300 custom tailors (probably all male) in Hartford who went on strike earlier in the month and had been successful in winning higher wages. However, the women were unsuccessful.

It is interesting to note that it was the workers in the "women's industries" who were much more apt to go on strike. They had a longer history in that line of work, found it easier to band together, and were in no conflict with male co-workers, or hostile unions. Many women in traditionally male munitions work were there temporarily, and others were earning so much more than they ever had that they saw no reason to strike. In these industries unskilled women were often at odds with the craftsmen they replaced. On the other hand strikes in Bridgeport in 1915 show a fascinating cooperative relationship between the unskilled females and the skilled males in the International Association of Machinists. [36]

ACTIVITY 5: ON STRIKE :

Many workers reached a point where they felt they had to unite and go on strike. Deplorable working conditions, long hours, and low pay united many workers across the state. Unlike the men, women were not highly unionized, though they still did strike. Sometimes the strike actions would pull men and women together when they realized they were both suffering under the same conditions. At other times it brought a further rift between the sexes because the men either saw the employment of women as destroying their skilled work, or saw them in direct competition for jobs, but receiving less pay.

Below are excerpts from an article which appeared in the *Hartford Times* on November 20, 1915. A collection of articles on all labor activity in Hartford between 1913 and 1920 can be found in Connecticut State Library Archives in Record Group 33, Boxes 199 and 200. The information was compiled by Anthony McKenna working for the WPA during the Depression.

When the students read these statements by striking women, have them:

1. List 5 complaints that both male and female workers had in common.
2. List 2 special problems women had due to their second class position in the work force and in the larger society.
3. List 2 advantages and 2 disadvantages for the women if they joined a union.

(figure available in print form)

Summary

After the war, women were encouraged to give their jobs back to returning service men. A U.S. Department of Labor letter sent to all employers in Connecticut stated,

> It is earnestly desired that you will state your needs so that they may be supplied and the situation met to find a peace job for the woman who has had a war job. This includes stenographers, filing clerks, etc. [37]

Many women returned to their homes. They were still not able to compete with men for the same jobs.

The following excerpt of a letter in response to a survey by the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau explains the tenuous position that women held in a brass and steel plant in Connecticut. It shows that women were not totally integrated into the work force, but adjuncts hired for emergency work only.

> May we explain that we took on women in our plant for the war period only, and we, therefore, could not compare the production of women with the production of men, as they did not work on the same jobs. We have now entirely discontinued the war work, and have no women in our plant at all. No changes were necessary in the machinery, equipment, as we built up an entirely new department, with new machinery, equipment, etc., with the express intention of employing women on particular operations. We could have continued to employ the women had we continued on the work which we were doing during the war. We might also state that the use of women in our plant was very successful, and we most certainly would use women in the future on any similar work or on any [38] work which we may take up in the future of a light character.

The movement of large numbers of women into the work force in the 2Oth century was marked by their entrance into poorly paid low status jobs. The major trend in Connecticut, as in the country, was a move out of domestic service into clerical occupations. Indeed, women made few lasting break-throughs in the labor market in the war period that were not orchestrated by the economic needs of the country.

Though the changes may have been limited, they did take place. Opportunities and work place autonomy did change for women. Propelled by the war, women shifted jobs and took advantage of jobs they had never had the chance to take before, and had never been encouraged to take. They were able to weigh and evaluate options, and thus gained power as workers. What appears in statistical terms as a modest change was for thousands of women a time of enormous personal change and adjustment. In the patriotic fervor of the war many women felt that the rhetoric of democracy and human dignity should also have meaning in their work. [39]

Attitudes about women did change to a limited degree. It became acceptable for single women to work. The taboo against working married women remained even though between twenty and twenty-five percent of women who worked were married. Still, women were hired at jobs which left them in a submissive role in the work place to reinforce male-female relationships in the larger world. They left the direct submissive role of domestics and entered the not-too-subtle subservient roles as clerical workers. The economic power structure, consolidated during this period, was able to keep women in dead-end jobs. As evidenced by the interviews with the workers, they were somehow able to survive, and some were strong enough to risk their jobs in a fight for more control and a desire for a better life. It is these women who laid the building blocks for the continued challenge of women today to sex stereotyping in jobs, pay, working conditions, and society.

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27. Women's Bureau, No. 27, p. 1.
28. Anne S. McFarland, Aetna Lirarian, interview on July 23, 1981.
29. Baxandall et al, p.p. 234-5.
30. Margery Davies, "Women's Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labor Force," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* , ed. by Zillah R. Eisenstein (New York: Monthly

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31. Rodgers, p. 27.
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36. See Cecelia Bucki's article as cited above.
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