

# Workers' Rights Primary Source Documents

When reviewing these documents below for your project, consider the following questions:

- 1) What are the problems that workers faced in regards to their rights being violated?
- 2) What methods/strategies did workers use to try to solve these problems?
- 3) How effective/successful were workers in protecting their rights and why?

**Document #1:** The following is an excerpt from William Cooper's testimony before the Sadler Committee in 1832. The committee, led by Michael Sadler, investigated working conditions in factories and mills.

Sadler: What is your age?  
Cooper: I am eight and twenty.  
Sadler: When did you first begin to work in the mills?  
Cooper: When I was ten years of age.  
Sadler: What were your usual hours of working?  
Cooper: We began at five in the morning and stopped at nine in the night.  
Sadler: What time did you have for meals?  
Cooper: We had just one period of 40 minutes in the 16 hours. That was at noon.  
Sadler: What means were taken to keep you awake and attentive?  
Cooper: At times we were frequently strapped (whipped).  
Sadler: When your hours were so long, did you have time to attend school?  
Cooper: We had no time to go to school.  
Sadler: Can you read and write?  
Cooper: I can read, but I cannot write.

**Document #2:** The following are testimonials from employees at the Wilson Mill in Bedford, Massachusetts. According to the document, how did the Industrial Revolution impact the lives of American factory workers?

*Elizabeth Bentley:*  
"I worked from five in the morning till nine at night. I lived two miles from the mill. We had no clock. If I had been too late at the mill I would have been quartered. I mean that if I had been a quarter of an hour too late a half an hour would have been taken off. I only got a penny an hour and they would have taken a halfpenny."

*Frank Forrest:*  
"In reality there were no regular hours, masters and managers did with us as they like. The clocks in the factories were often put forward in the morning and back at night. Though this was known amongst the hands we were afraid to speak and a workman then was afraid to carry a watch."

**Document #3:** Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940), photographer, sociologist and humanist, is best known for his portraits of immigrants at Ellis Island. He traveled across the country documenting living and working conditions. He wrote of this picture—“Some of the doffers and the Superintendent. Ten small boys and girls about the size out of a force of 40 employees. Catawba Cotton Mill, Newton, NC”



Note: When a bobbin was filled, the “doffer boy” comes along, takes it off the spinning frame and puts an empty bobbin in its place.

**Document #4:** The following is an excerpt from the testimony of textile worker Joseph Hebergam to the Sadler Committee.

Sadler: What is the nature of your illness?

Hebergam: I have damaged lungs. My leg muscles do not function properly and will not support the weight of my bones.

Sadler: A doctor has told you that you will die within the year, is that correct?

Hebergam: I have been so told.

Sadler: Did he tell you the cause of your illness?

Hebergam: He told me that it was caused by dust in the factories and from overwork and insufficient diet.

Sadler: To what was your brother’s death attributed?

Hebergam: He was cut by a machine and died of infection.

**Document #5:**



**Document #6:**





**Document #7:** Excerpt from *In the Depths of a Coal Mine* by Stephen Crane in McClure's Magazine, August 1894.

We came upon other little low-roofed chambers, each containing two men, a "miner," who makes the blasts, and his "laborer," who loads the coal upon the cars and assists the miner generally. Great and mystically dreadful is the earth from a mine's depth. Man is in the implacable grasp of nature. It has only to tighten slightly, and he is crushed like a bug. His loudest shriek of agony would be as impotent as his final moan to bring help from that fair land that lies, like Heaven, over his head. There is an insidious, silent enemy in the gas. If the huge fanwheel on the top of the earth should stop for a brief period, there is certain death. If a man escape the gas, the floods, the "squeezes" of falling rock, the cars shooting through little tunnels, the precarious elevators, the hundred perils, there usually comes to him an attack of "miner's asthma" that slowly racks and shakes him into the grave. Meanwhile the miner gets three dollars per day, and his laborer one dollar a quarter.

**Document #8:** Girls at the weaving machines, Lincoln Cotton Mills, Evansville, Indiana.



**Document #9:**



**Document #10:**

