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Blackwelder, Julia. 1997 *Now hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995*, Texas, Texas A&M University Press.

The industrial revolution and the Gilded Age brought on massive cultural and social changes to the landscape of the United States. One area that was greatly impacted by these changes was the working environment. Work was transformed from rural farming to industrial labor almost overnight. In 1900 the growing industrial sector composed of manufacturing, transportation, and communication “contributed twice as much dollar value to the U.S economy as agriculture, forestry, and fishing combined” (Blackwelder, 1997: 5). This rapid change in labor affected not just men, but also saw great changes to women in the workforce. Women would find a large expansion in low-level service occupations and a larger variety of jobs available in service employment (Blackwelder, 1997: 6). Yet occupation for women was not universal distributed, labor generally corresponded to class, race, and ethnicity. The book *Now hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995*, by Julia Blackwelder makes this point very clear, along with tracing the transformation of women in the workforce.

The textile mills were the first area of work that was made available for “first generation” female workers (Blackwelder, 1997: 8). This kind of low skill orientated occupation attracted those poor native born and immigrant populations who made the initial transition into the urban landscape of city life. For most of them work had become a “necessity rather than a choice among poor women...to cover the bare necessities” (Blackwelder, 1997: 9). The conditions in these mills forced to toil in “brutal, sweatshop misery” that caused the death of many individual due to little working regulations (Blackwelder, 1997: 12). Not only were the conditions of work lacking, but so were the areas many were forced to live in. In 1900 35% of all working women

either lived with their employer or boarded in work homes. These homes lacked any kind of private quarters and “in the cheapest boarding quarters, a woman had neither a room nor a bed to herself but shared a bed with a border who worked while the other slept” (Blackwelder, 1997: 27).

In 1900 five million women in the United States worked for wages of some kind, translating to one in five workers in the labor force being women (Blackwelder, 1997: 11). Yet despite these numbers showing a growth in women participating in the workforce, a disproportionate 78% were located in low paying service or manufacturing jobs. Women in professional high skill orientated occupations accounted for only 12% of the labor force. Women were also compensated at roughly 50 cents for every dollar in comparison to men (Blackwelder, 1997: 11-12). Women were also largely excluded from union membership, making up only 3% in 1900 (Blackwelder, 1997: 56). The socio demographics of the majority of the workforce of women were composed primarily of poor uneducated single women. When accounting for class, race, and ethnicity this number was greatly expanded upon, showing black women, immigrants, and native-born working-class whites making up the brunt of the labor force (Blackwelder, 1997: 13).

From 1900 to 1914 13 million immigrants made their way to the United States, most seeking employment, of those one third were women or girls (Blackwelder, 1997: 19). Immigrant women isolated from their kin and social networks could also easily be taken advantage of under false promises of employment. This could lead to poor working conditions or even forced prostitution (Blackwelder, 1997: 24-25). While Native-born white women were largely hired as office workers or sales clerks and also held higher positions in the professional fields, immigrants generally held low skill positions in domestic service or manufacturing.

(Blackwelder, 1997: 16). Women of separate classes lacked any kind of coherent solidarity in the workforce as well. Blue-Collar women who generally worked on shop floors had few interactions with their white –collar counterparts in office jobs such as secretary (Blackwelder, 1997: 53). This allowed for a divide between classes that had three in twenty women of white native born decent holding professional jobs, while three of one hundred immigrant women held professions occupations (Blackwelder, 1997: 15-16).

In 1880 only 60% of white girls ages 5-19 and 33% of non-white girls of the same age attended formal schools (Blackwelder, 1997: 39). Women were generally expected to learn traditional domestic gender roles of “homemaker and mother” thought-out their education in the 18th and early 20th century (Blackwelder, 1997: 38). These notions regarding gender roles and works is apparent by the fact that teenage boys were twice as likely to enter the workforce than teenage girls and nine of ten men had already entered the workforce in their twenties (Blackwelder, 1997: 13). A woman master status was expected to be wife and mother once married; there would be no role conflict between work and family. Once married the rates of foreign born white women dropped from 60.9% to 3.6%, while native born whites dropped from 21.5% to 3%. In both cases we see despite women interesting the job market at different rates, the cult of domesticity was still the dominant norms regarding women in marriage (Blackwelder, 1997: 15).

Education transformations in the Gilded Age and onward did see a shift in the number of women getting an education and the kind they received. Between 1880 and 1920 the number of women with four year degrees grew from 2,500 to 16,600, compared to men who grew from 10,400 to 32,000 (Blackwelder, 1997: 39). Education was largely made available to women of middle class and upper background, allowing them to branch out into a wider variety of fields.

Uneducated poor women on the other hand we “locked into poorly paid production or service jobs” with little hope of altering their circumstances (Blackwelder, 1997: 58).