**Lowell Girls Document Analysis**

**Directions:** Attached to this handout is a set of documents related to the following question:

Were the Lowell girls treated fairly? Pick 6 of the 8 documents provided and

complete the chart below.

**Question:** During the early 1800’s America’s labor force was split between slave labor in the south

and factory workers in the north. Factory workers were frequently referred to as “wage slaves.”

To what extent was northern factory work similar to southern slavery?

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| **Doc** | **Were the Lowell Girls Treated Fairly? (Yes or No?)** | **How Can You Tell?** |
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Document A: Letter from Sarah Hodgdon to Her Mother, 1830

I take this opportunity to write to you to informe you that I have gone into the mill and like it very well. I was here one week and three days before I went into the mill to work for my board. We board together. I like the my boarding place very well. I enjoy my health very well. I do not enjoy my mind so well as it is my desire to. I cant go to any meetings except I hire a seat there I have to stay home on that account.

Give my love to my father and tell him not to forget me and to my dear sister and to my brothers and to my grandmother tell her I do not forget her and to my Aunts and to all my enquiring friends. I want that you should write to me as soon as you can and when you write to me I want that you should write to me the particulars about sister and Aunt Betsy. Don’t fail writing.

Sarah Hodgdon

### Document B*: Boston Transcript* reports on Lowell Strike, 1834

We learn that extraordinary excitement was occasioned at Lowell, last week, by an announcement that the wages paid in some of the departments would be reduced 15 percent on the 1st of March. The reduction principally affected the female operatives, and they held several meetings, or caucuses, at which a young woman presided, who took an active part in persuading her associates to give notice that they should quit the mills, and to induce them to 'make a run' on the Lowell Bank and the Savings Bank, which they did.

On Friday morning, the young woman referred to was dismissed, by the Agent...and on leaving the office...waved her calash in the air, as a signal to the others, who were watching from the windows, when they immediately 'struck' and assembled about her, in despite of the overseers.

The number soon increased to nearly 800. A procession was formed, and they marched about the town, to the amusement of a mob of idlers and boys, and we are sorry to add, not altogether to the credit of Yankee girls....

Document C: Song Lyrics Sung By Striking Lowell Girls, 1840

Oh! isn’t it a pity, such a pretty girl as I-

Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die?

Oh ! I cannot be a slave,

I will not be a slave,

For I’m so fond of liberty

That I cannot be a slave.

Document D: Song of the Spinners, 1841

The day is ‘oer, nor longer we toil and spin;

For ev’ning’s hush withdraws from the daily din.

And now we sing, with gladsome hearts,

The theme of the spinner’s song, That labor to lei-sure a zest imparts,

Unknown to the idle throng.

We spin all day, and then, in the time for rest,

Sweet peace is found, A joyous and welcome guest.

Despite of toil we all agree,

or out of the Mills, or dependent on other we ne’er will be.

So long as we’re able to spin.

Document E: Letter from Mary Paul to her Father, 1845

Dear father,

I received your letter on Thursday the 14th with much pleasure. I am well which is one comfort. My life and health are spared while others are cut off. Last Thursday one girl fell down and broke her neck which caused instant death. She was going in or coming out of the mill and slipped down it being very icy. The same day a man was killed by the cars. Another nearly had all of his ribs broken. Another was nearly killed by falling down and having a bale of cotton fall on him. Last Tuesday we were paid. In all I had six dollars and sixty cents paid four dollars and sixty-eight cents for board. With the rest I got me a pair of rubbers and a pair of fifty cent shoes. I get along very well with my work. I can doff as fast as any girl in our room.…I think that the factory is the best place for me and if any girl wants employment I advise them to come to Lowell. Tell Harriet that though she does not hear from me she is not forgotten. I have little time to devote to writing that I cannot write all I want to…..

Mary S. Paul

Document F: Lowell Boardinghouse, Partial List of Rules, 1845

All persons are required to board in one of the boarding houses belonging to the company, and conform to the regulations of the house in which they board.

No disorderly or improper conduct must be allowed in the houses.

The doors must be closed at 10 o’clock in the evening; and no person admitted after that time, unless a sufficient excuse can be given.

The buildings, both inside and out and the yards about them, must be kept clean and in good order. If the buildings or fences are injured, they will be repaired and charged to the occupant.

All persons are required to be constant in attendance on public worship, at one of the regular places of worship in this place.

All persons intending to leave the employment of the company, are required to give notice of the same to their overseer, at least two weeks previous to the time of leaving.

Any one who shall take from the mills, or the yard, any yarn, cloth, or other article belonging to the company, will be considered guilty of stealing – and prosecuted accordingly.

All persons who shall have complied with the rules, on leaving the employment of the company, shall be entitled to an honorable discharge, which will serve as a recommendation to any of the factories in Lowell. No one who shall not have complied with them will be entitled to such a discharge.

Document G: “Slaver” Wagons, Published in Voice of Industry, 1846

We were not aware, until within a few days, of the *modus operandi* of the factory powers in this village of forcing poor girls from their quiet homes to become their tools and, like the Southern slaves, to give up their life and liberty to the heartless tyrants and taskmasters.

Observing a singular-looking "long, low, black" wagon passing along the street, we made inquiries respecting it, and were informed that it was what we term a "slaver." She makes regular trips to the north of the state [Massachusetts], cruising around in Vermont and New Hampshire, with a "commander" whose heart must be as black as his craft, who is paid a dollar a head for all he brings to the market, and more in proportion to the distance-if they bring them from such a distance that they cannot easily get back.

This is done by "hoisting false colors," and representing to the girls that they can tend more machinery than is possible, and that the work is so very neat, and the wages such that they can dress in silks and spend half their time in reading. Now, is this true? Let those girls who have been thus deceived, answer….

Is there any humanity in this? Philanthropists may talk of [African] slavery, but it would be well first to endeavor to emancipate the slaves at home. Let us not stretch our ears to catch the sound of the lash on the flesh of the oppressed black while the oppressed in our very midst are crying out in thunder tones, and calling upon us for assistance.

Document H: Time Table of the Lowell Mills, 1853

