The Long Integration

Civil Rights, Union Wars, and Brown Lung in the Southern Mill · 1960–1985

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

GUIDING QUESTION

Did civil rights law, union organizing, and the brown lung movement change Southern mills, or did the industry's decline overtake them?

PART 1 Before you read

1. Read the guiding question. Write down what you already know, or think you know, about it.

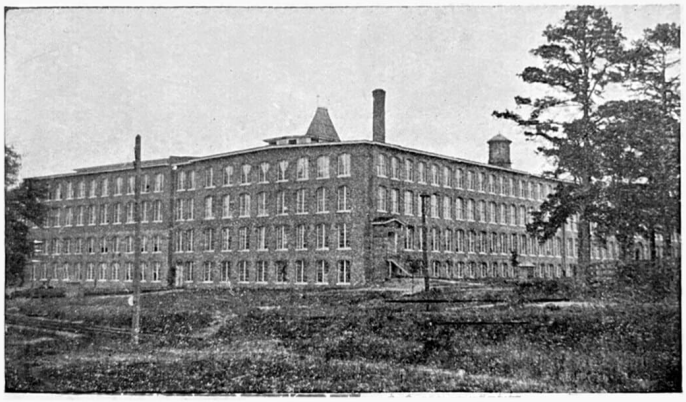
2. Predict one way your answer might change after reading the sources.

PART 2 Read

For most of the twentieth century the Southern cotton mill was a white workplace by design, and its owners were among the most determined opponents of organized labor in the nation. Between 1960 and 1985, Black workers, union organizers, and disabled millhands used federal law to force open the mill gates, win the first contracts at J.P. Stevens, and make cotton dust a regulated hazard.

In 1960 only 3.3 percent of Southern textile workers were Black. Black men had long been hired for the yard, the opening room, and other laboring jobs, but production work at the frames and looms was reserved for whites, and Black women were almost never hired at all. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 changed the legal terrain, and Black workers acted on it: they wrote to the new Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, testified at its textile forum in Charlotte in January 1967, and filed lawsuits against nearly every major firm in the industry. By 1978 one in four Southern textile workers was Black. The same years brought the industry's longest labor war. J.P. Stevens, the nation's second-largest textile company, resisted unionization from 1963 until it signed a contract in 1980, and the Supreme Court's 1965 Darlington

decision defined how far an employer could go to escape a union. Meanwhile retired and disabled millhands organized around a disease the industry had long minimized, byssinosis, and won a federal cotton dust standard that the Court upheld in 1981. These were separate campaigns, but they converged on the same mill towns: Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, was at once the site of a landmark discrimination suit, the union victory dramatized in Norma Rae, and a chapter of the Carolina Brown Lung Association.



A cotton mill at Darlington, South Carolina, about 1905. In 1956 the Darlington Manufacturing Company closed days after its workers voted for a union-the case behind the Supreme Court's 1965 Darlington decision. Illustrated Post Card Co., "Darlington, S.C. Cotton Mill," tinted halftone postcard, c. 1905. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

PART 3

Timeline

For each event, write one sentence on why it mattered.

1965

Textile Workers Union v. Darlington

On March 29 the Supreme Court rules that an employer may close its entire business even out of hostility to a union, but that a partial closing aimed at chilling unionism elsewhere is unlawful.

1967

The EEOC Textile Forum

On January 12–13 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission holds public hearings in Charlotte on the exclusion of Black workers from Southern textile production jobs.

1974

The Roanoke Rapids Vote

On August 28 workers at J.P. Stevens's Roanoke Rapids plants vote for union representation, eleven years after the organizing campaign began.

1978

The Cotton Dust Standard

On June 23 OSHA cuts the permissible cotton dust exposure in yarn manufacturing from 1,000 to 200 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

1980

The Stevens Contract

On October 19 J.P. Stevens and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union reach agreement, ending the boycott and corporate campaign.

PART 4

Key terms

Write the letter of the matching definition beside each term.

_____ **Title VII**

_____ **EEOC**

_____ **Byssinosis (brown lung)**

_____ **OSHA**

_____ **Union election**

A. A lung disease caused by breathing cotton dust, common among workers in older textile mills.

B. The section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that bans job discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

C. A secret-ballot vote, supervised by the National Labor Relations Board, in which workers decide whether to be represented by a union.

D. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency that enforces laws against job discrimination.

E. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the federal agency created in 1970 to set and enforce workplace safety rules.

PART 5

Primary source workshop

These excerpts are quoted word for word, including the spelling and language of their time.

DOCUMENT A

Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, Section 703(a)

U.S. Congress, July 2, 1964

> It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer—(1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or (2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Context: Title VII banned job discrimination and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Combined with federal contract rules and lawsuits, it opened Southern textile production jobs, long reserved for white workers, to Black men and women.

Source: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. 1964-. https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964

Historical context

What was happening when and where this was created?

Intended audience

Who was meant to read, hear, or see it?

Purpose

Why was it created? What did its creator want to happen?

Point of view

Whose perspective does it show, and whose is missing?

DOCUMENT B

Recollection of the 1973 J.P. Stevens Organizing Campaign

Crystal Lee Sutton, 1973 (later recollection)

> "Management and others treated me as if I had leprosy," ... "I took a piece of cardboard and wrote the word UNION on it in big letters, got up on my work table, and slowly turned it around. The workers started cutting their machines off and giving me the victory sign. All of a sudden the plant was very quiet ..."

Context: Sutton was fired from J.P. Stevens in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, for union organizing; her protest inspired the 1979 film Norma Rae. Workers there won a union election in 1974, but Stevens did not sign a contract until 1980.

Source: About Crystal Lee Sutton (Crystal Lee Sutton Collection). Alamance Community College Library-. https://library.alamancecc.edu/sutton/about

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DOCUMENT C

American Textile Manufacturers Institute v. Donovan

U.S. Supreme Court (opinion of Justice William J. Brennan Jr.), June 17, 1981

> Byssinosis, known in its more severe manifestations as "brown lung" disease, is a serious and potentially disabling respiratory disease primarily caused by the inhalation of cotton dust. ... In its most serious form, byssinosis is a chronic and irreversible obstructive pulmonary disease, clinically similar to chronic bronchitis or emphysema, and can be severely disabling. ... Estimates indicate that at least 35,000 employed and retired cotton mill workers, or 1 in 12 such workers, suffer from the most disabling form of byssinosis.

Context: The textile industry sued to block OSHA's 1978 cotton dust standard, arguing its costs outweighed its benefits. The Court upheld the rule, a major victory for the Carolina Brown Lung Association and retired mill workers.

Source: American Textile Mfrs. Institute, Inc. v. Donovan, 452 U.S. 490 (1981). Justia U.S. Supreme Court Center. 1981. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/452/490/

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Corroborate
Compare "Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, Section 703(a)" (U.S. Congress, July 2, 1964) with "Recollection of the 1973 J.P. Stevens Organizing Campaign" (Crystal Lee Sutton, 1973 (later recollection)). Where do they agree, where do they differ, and what might explain the differences?

PART 6

Discuss

1. What two kinds of employer actions does Section 703(a) of Title VII make illegal?

2. Sutton's words come from a later recollection quoted by a college archive that holds her papers, and her story was retold in the Hollywood film Norma Rae. How might memory and fame shape her account?

3. Black workers entered Southern mills in large numbers under Title VII just as unions campaigned at J.P. Stevens and brown lung activists pushed for health rules. How did these movements reinforce or compete with each other?

4. In 1981 the Supreme Court upheld OSHA's cotton dust standard without requiring a cost-benefit test. Should regulators today have to prove that a health rule's benefits outweigh its costs before protecting workers? Argue.

PART 7

Write: claim, evidence, reasoning

Answer the guiding question in one paragraph, using the documents and the reading.

Claim	Answers the guiding question directly in one or two sentences.
Evidence	Cites at least two primary sources by name and at least one fact from the reading.
Reasoning	Explains how each piece of evidence supports the claim.
Sourcing	Notes at least one limitation of a source: who made it, when, and why.

PART 8

Exit ticket

1. In one sentence, how would you answer the guiding question now?

2. What piece of evidence would most change your mind?

Keep exploring

LABOR

Opening the Mill Gates

How Black workers used Title VII to integrate the South's largest industry.

https://www.threadingamerica.com/topics/opening-the-mill-gates

BIOGRAPHY

The Real Norma Rae

Crystal Lee Sutton, a cardboard sign, and the seventeen-year fight to organize J.P. Stevens.

https://www.threadingamerica.com/topics/crystal-lee-sutton

LABOR

Remember Darlington

A mill closed to punish a union vote, and the Supreme Court case that followed.

https://www.threadingamerica.com/topics/remember-darlington

IMPACT

Brown Lung

Byssinosis, the Carolina Brown Lung Association, and the fight for a cotton dust standard.

https://www.threadingamerica.com/topics/brown-lung

Places: Alabama

SOURCES AND CREDITS

Timothy J. Minchin. Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960–1980. University of North Carolina Press. 1999. https://uncpress.org/9780807847718/hiring-the-black-worker/

Textile Workers Union v. Darlington Manufacturing Co., 380 U.S. 263 (1965). Justia U.S. Supreme Court Center. 1965. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/380/263/

American Textile Manufacturers Institute, Inc. v. Donovan, 452 U.S. 490 (1981). Justia U.S. Supreme Court Center. 1981. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/452/490/

The Real 'Norma Rae'. North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. 2016-. https://www.dncr.nc.gov/blog/2016/08/28/real-norma-rae

Image: Illustrated Post Card Co., "Darlington, S.C. Cotton Mill," tinted halftone postcard, c. 1905. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

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