

Your Assigned Identity: African American Worker

After the Civil War many African American's moved from the south into the north. They came into cities like Worcester and settled into established communities of color. Many times these communities already included both Native Americans and African Americans. Worcester's African American population was small but growing. Worcester was an early abolitionist center during the antebellum years and during the Civil War, and many freed former slaves migrated to Worcester during and following the civil war. Many came from South Carolina and families would often settle in the same areas over time. Despite its early support for abolition, the white population of Worcester was not always welcoming towards the increase in both African American and Native American residents. As industry expanded many African American men found work in factories or on the railroads, jobs that were often held by white populations previously. This caused tension to rise between the communities and the opposition to civil rights grew in Worcester. White-owned Worcester industry, like the machine shops and factories, created an informal ban on African American employees, hiring European migrant workers rather than African Americans. Overall, the jobs held by African Americans were lower paid and more dangerous than those held by white men. The effects of these racial policies could be felt not only in economic life, but also in social life. African Americans in Worcester developed their own social, economic, and political communities. Many joined fraternal organizations like the Knights of Pythias, which encouraged men to be good fathers and hard workers, or the NAACP, which fought for the rights of African Americans and other people of color in the United States. Over time, many African American workers brought their extended families to live with them, hoping for economic, political and social opportunities for them and their children.

Based on the description above and the primary source documents you have received, decide how African American workers would have felt about the debate topics listed below. Use your worksheet to guide your thoughts. Carefully consider if there could be multiple perspectives within the same social group. Use your background knowledge from school to help guide your thoughts. Think critically about your primary sources and consider context questions like who wrote your primary sources, where they were originally published and who was part of the original audience.

Today's Debate Topics:

- 1) Jim Crow Laws and political conditions in the Southern United States
- 2) Employment opportunities for people of color in Worcester and surrounding areas

Your Assigned Identity: European Migrant Worker

As the number of industrial factories increased in the north, factory owners and industrialists realized they needed more workers to fill their mills. They had previously employed women from farming towns across New England, but that was a small labor market. When the women began to organize protests, the factories began to employ European immigrants. These men and women came from European ethnic groups that immigrated from Europe or Canada to Worcester in the decades surrounding the Civil War. Though they are often grouped together, factory owners differentiated between groups of people from different parts of Europe. For instance, Irish and Eastern European people often faced greater levels of discrimination than those from other parts of the European continent or Canada. Many people began to migrate in order to find work in the rapidly growing factories in cities like Worcester. Farmers began moving their farms to the western frontier for better farming land that could produce larger profits. Others sold their farms and moved into the city to find work in the factories. In Worcester, migrants from a variety of ethnic groups lived and worked in the same areas, seeking the same jobs and opportunities. Some of these migrants brought knowledge of socialism, anarchism, and workers unions from Europe; all controversial topics in the United States. These political differences lead to increased tensions between different labor groups, especially during strikes. The factory owners would often bring in new workers from another ethnic group to break a strike with their current workers. European migrants were often economically dependent on industrial factories and many of them fought for higher wages and shorter hours. Despite their fight for workers' rights, they many European workers did not fight for civil rights or women's rights. While some workers' rights groups did include communities of color, others viewed African American migrants from the south as competition that would drive the price of labor down.

Based on the description above and the primary source documents you have received, decide how European migrant workers would have felt about the debate topics listed below. Use your worksheet to guide your thoughts. Carefully consider if there could be multiple perspectives within the same social group. Use your background knowledge from school to help guide your thoughts. Think critically about your primary sources and consider context questions like who wrote your primary sources, where they were originally published and who was part of the original audience.

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Your Assigned Identity: Farmer

Far before factories came to Worcester, the surrounding area was largely farm land. Farming and agriculture were very common in Worcester from the time of early settlement all the way through the Civil War. Though the land was rocky and the growing season was short, residents took great pride in farming the land. In the early 1800s, significant portions of the land were deforested, making pastures for raising animals and open land that could be tilled for farming. In the early 1800s Worcester agriculture was doing well; they even held a yearly agricultural fair. Many farmers were respected community members. However, as the country expanded westward, land in Ohio and other states became available. It was easier to work, cheaper to buy, and had a better growing season. The introduction of railroads meant that crops could be grown out West and then transported and sold all over the country. As early as the 1830s, many farmers from New England had abandoned their farms. Worcester's farming population lasted longer than in other parts of Massachusetts. During the Industrial Era, those who remained grew the food to feed the mill workers, which became a profitable industry. Worcester farmers watched the surrounding areas quickly turned from profitable farmland into abandoned fields and forests. Many people, especially young men, moved to the city looking for jobs and opportunities. After the Civil War, farming communities across the country began to struggle to make money. Many farmers from around the country joined the Populist Party, which was a political party founded by farmers in the 1870s. They believed current politics benefited those in cities, like industrialists, while harming rural populations. Despite the local population growth, New England farms could not compete with farms in the south and west. Many people came to see farmers as a poor, uneducated population. Young people often looked for work in the city instead and farming populations continued to shrink through the early 1900s.

Based on the description above and the primary source documents you have received, decide how farmers would have felt about the debate topics listed below. Use your worksheet to guide your thoughts. Carefully consider if there could be multiple perspectives within the same social group. Use your background knowledge from school to help guide your thoughts. Think critically about your primary sources and consider context questions like who wrote your primary sources, where they were originally published and who was part of the original audience.

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Your Assigned Identity: Industrialist

America began to industrialize in the 1790s. However it wasn't until the 1830s that Worcester found its identity as an industrial city. By and large, early factories were powered by water, necessitating a nearby river with a significant drop, such as a waterfall, in order to build a successful industrial mill. In 1828 the Blackstone Canal linked Worcester to Providence, and soon after, in 1835, the railroad to Boston opened. Early industries in Worcester included this railroad, and mechanical production, like making wire. After the Civil War, the population grew quickly and provided a larger workforce. Industries like wire making and tool making all grew with the increased population. Other industrial ventures also flourished. Machines built in Worcester helped power the booming textile industry in cities like Lowell and Lawrence. As African Americans migrated north after the Civil War, factory owners had to make a choice about whether or not to employ people of color in their factories. Many chose to employ only white immigrants of European descent, though there were certain groups of immigrants that were preferred over others. The distinction between male and female workers was also a motivating factor in factory work. Some mills, such as shoe and corset makers, had a long history of employing a female workforce, while other types of production favored men. Finding workers who were affordable and met certain social standards, such as being white, could be a challenge. The other major factor to consider was the source of raw materials. Many northern factories relied on raw materials produced in the south, like cotton. The political conditions in the south effected the availability and cost of these resources. For many Northern Industrialists, the most important consideration was profit, while others placed more value on the social class of their workers.

Based on the description above and the primary source documents you have recieved, decide how industrialists would have felt about the debate topics listed below. Use your worksheet to guide your thoughts. Carefully consider if there could be multiple perspectives within the same social group. Use your background knowledge from school to help guide your thoughts. Think critically about your primary sources and consider context questions like who wrote your primary sources, where they were originally published and who was part of the original audience.

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Your Assigned Identity: Nipmuc Peoples

Historically, the Nipmuc people lived in central Massachusetts and parts of Connecticut and Rhode Island. The Nipmuc people lived on this land far before there were written records of the population. They lived in small villages, united into one larger community by family lineage, shared culture, and economic ties. When European settlers moved into the land, the Nipmuc people resisted, but many died from disease or moved away. The remaining Nipmuc peoples continued to resist, fighting in Queen Anne's and King George's War, as well as King Philip's War, when the Nipmuc and Wampanoag peoples' alliance nearly ended white settlement in New England. Due to continued hostilities, Nipmuc people did not immediately integrate into the European population, instead integrating into other emerging communities of color. Beginning in the 1700s, native peoples in southern New England began to intermarry with the African American population in the surrounding areas. Both communities faced intense discrimination from the Europeans, and they often lived and worked in similar areas. The Nipmuc peoples also fought in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. The ongoing military conflicts meant a shortage of young men in the community, so many of the young women married into the African American community in order to continue their lineage. In 1869, Native Americans in Massachusetts became legal citizens through the Massachusetts Indian Enfranchisement Act. Many Nipmuc people moved from ancestral lands into cities like Worcester looking for work in industrial factories or on the railroad. When they came to the city, drawn by the booming economy, they moved into areas like Beaver Brook, already commonly inhabited by communities of color. This continued association led to a strong bond between people of color in the city and family ties that we can trace down through Worcester residents today.

Based on the description above and the primary source documents included in this profile, decide how Nipmuc peoples would have felt about the issues that will be discussed at the town hall. Use your worksheet to guide your thoughts. Carefully consider if there may be multiple perspectives within the same social group. Use your background knowledge from school to help guide your thoughts. Think critically about your primary sources and consider context questions like who wrote it, where it was originally published and who was part of the original audience for the piece.

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Your Assigned Identity: Woman Worker

As Northern Industrialists began to build factories all over New England, they needed to employ a large workforce. At the time, most of New England was populated with farming communities, so the mill and factory owners looked to these communities to try and find workers. Young women were largely not employed; they rarely worked on the farm. They were one of the first populations that came to work in mills and factories. In farming communities, the populations were largely European immigrant descendants, so the original mill girls were mostly white, female workers. Over time, this became less common and the workforce became more diverse. While women still held many factory jobs, men also began to work in machine shops and wire production. The women remained in factories producing shoes and corsets. In the early 1900s, African Americans and Native Americans moved into the cities. Many women from both of these communities also looked for work in Worcester. In many cases, women of color could not find the same jobs as white women. They became domestic servants, laundresses, farm workers and boarding house keepers. Often, African American families who moved north still had family living in the south. They worked hard in order to bring other family members to live in towns like Worcester. Women of all racial groups were paid less than their male co-workers and had no workplace protections. It became even more difficult to find jobs for women after they were married or had children. There was significant labor unrest in the female population and women industrial workers went on strike a number of times all over New England, including participating in the famous Bread and Roses strike in Lawrence Massachusetts. When these workers became too difficult to manage, many factories would hire new workers rather than increase wages. Though women would not get the right to vote until 1920, many suffrage groups had already organized and were fighting for the right to vote.

Based on the description above and the primary source documents you have received, decide how women workers would have felt about the debate topics listed below. Use your worksheet to guide your thoughts. Carefully consider if there could be multiple perspectives within the same social group. Use your background knowledge from school to help guide your thoughts. Think critically about your primary sources and consider context questions like who wrote your primary sources, where they were originally published and who was part of the original audience.

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