There can be no doubt that the industrialization of the United States established the foundations for economic expansion, prosperity, and a standard of living higher than Americans had enjoyed in the past and higher, too, than the inhabitants of practically any other country in the world. But there was a price to be paid for these advances. Many of the fruits of industrialization took some time to become fully ripe and could only be enjoyed in the long run. In the short run, the process often led to social dislocation, confusion, conflict, and a great deal of misery.

The growing industrial labor force, or substantial portions of it, was one group that paid the price of industrialization. Largely without the protection that unions and labor legislation would later provide, industrial workers in the late nineteenth century were overworked, underpaid, routinely subjected to dangerous or unhealthy working conditions, frequently laid off without warning, and compensated little or not at all for such layoffs or for any accidents they suffered or diseases they contracted as a result of the conditions under which they worked. All of this helped to keep labor costs low and profits high. It can reasonably be suggested that America's industrial might was built not only upon the labor of its workers, but also upon their suffering.

Despite this, America's industries continued to attract workers. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, many of them came from Europe. An even larger reservoir of industrial labor, however, was made up of native-born Americans pushed off farms by the declining economic rewards to be found in agriculture and attracted by the prospect of the more or less steady pay to be had in industry. This was particularly true in the South, where the textile industry began to grow in the late nineteenth century. There were almost no immigrants to draw on to supply the mills' needs for workers, but there was a ready supply of rural folk willing to give up farming for "public work," as the early mill workers termed it. As the following selection by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al. indicates, after a while, many began to doubt the wisdom of their choice, but by that time, it was too late to return to the agricultural way of life they had left. More important, it may well have been that they had had no real choice in the first place, having been driven into the mills by sheer economic necessity.
First-generation workers in southern mills had more to learn than just the mechanics of a new job. On the farm they had chosen and ordered their tasks according to their needs and the demands of their crops. Now they drove themselves to the continuous pace of a machine. Whereas most men, women, and children had once worked together and enjoyed the fruits of their own labor, now they were "hands," working under a boss's orders and for someone else's profit. Farm work, to be sure, had been hard, but mill work took a different toll. Millhands rose early in the morning, still tired from the day before. For ten, eleven, or twelve hours they walked, stretched, leaned, and pulled at their machines. Noise, heat, and humidity engulfed them. The lint that settled on their hair and skin marked them as mill workers, and the cotton dust that silently entered their lungs could eventually cripple or kill them. At best, mill work was a wrenching change.

Chester Copeland came from a long line of farmers and carpenters in rural Orange County, North Carolina, and he remained a devoted farmer except for brief, and unhappy, sojourns in the mills. To him, mill work was "nothing but a robot life. Robot-ing is my word for it-in the mill you do the same thing over and over again-just like on a treadmill. There's no challenge to it-just drudgery. The more you do, the more they want done. But in farming you do work real close to nature. There's always something exciting and changing in nature. It's never a boring job. There's some dirty jobs in farming, but there's nothing you get more pleasure out of than planting, growing, and then harvesting. In other words, you get the four seasons just like there are in a person's life-the fall and winter and spring and summer."

Despite this loss of control, most workers stayed with the factory because it provided a steady income and the work seemed easier than farming, at least to some. Forrest Lacock found farming "a very satisfactory job-you've got no bossman." "But," he continued, "the trouble with what we call one-horse farming, you can't have an income sufficient to take care of all your bills. A public job is more interesting because you can meet your bills." Dewey Helms' father had another reason for coming to the mill. "He wasn't worried about the income he made on the farm; he made as much as he cared about. He wanted to get rid of the harder work. Working in the cotton mill was not as hard work as running one of them mountain farms." Mill work was not for everybody, but the majority of those who came to the factories "never did want to live on the farm no more. They learned how to work in the mill."

Reliance on the family labor system meant that the southern textile industry's growth was based to a large extent on the labor of children. Between 1880 and 1910 manufacturers reported that about one-quarter of their work force was under sixteen years of age, and many more child workers went unreported. Indeed, in the industry's early years, youngsters of seven or eight commonly doffed, spun, and did all sorts of casual labor. Originally the official definition of "children" applied to youngsters up to age eight but later rose to age twelve, then fourteen, and finally sixteen; nevertheless, young people remained crucial, both to the industry's profit margins and to their own families' survival.

Child labor was by no means unique to the South. The textile industry, wherever established, tended to rely on the labor of women and children. But the technical
breakthroughs that enabled the South to enter and eventually capture the market in cotton goods also encouraged a particularly intense exploitation of the young. Women and children led the first wave of migrants to the region's mills, and manufacturers matched them with the low-skill jobs created by the advent of ring spinning. A study of women and children laborers conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor in 1907-8 found that half the spinners were under fourteen and 90 percent were under twenty-one. As Naomi Trammel put it, "That's where they put the children. You could run a frame where you couldn't run anything else."

Technology made child labor practical, but not necessary. The practice spread primarily as a solution to problems of labor recruitment and as a system of socializing and controlling a prospective labor force. South Carolina industrialist William Gregg, founder of Graniteville, the Old South's premier cotton mill, had hoped to attract the daughters of impoverished farmers. Young single women failed to show up in large numbers, but Gregg continued to believe that the "large class of miserable poor white people among us . . . might be induced to place their children in a situation in which they would be educated and reared in industrious habits." His words captured the industry rationale: children made up a large portion of the surplus labor in the countryside; the lure of wages for everyone in the family could induce hard-pressed farmers to cast their lot with the mills; and children who went to work at an early age would eventually grow into efficient, tractable, long-term workers.

Critics of child labor were not hard to find. In the 1880s and 1890s the opposition was led by the Knights of Labor and the National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), who complained that the low wages paid to children held down the earnings of adults. But after the turn of the century a new group of middle-class social reformers took up the banner of the child labor crusade. Educational and religious leaders such as Alabama's Edgar Gardner Murphy and North Carolina's Alexander J. McKelway organized opposition at the state level and then helped form the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). These reformers worried that the mills' unlettered children would one day become a blight on the body politic. "In a democracy," McKelway argued, "the people all rule. Also, the people are ruled. And when it comes to the people's ruling us by their votes, electing our governors and presidents, initiating and vetoing legislation, taxing our incomes, we grow mightily concerned over the intelligence and independence of the electorate. We do not like to trust our interests now and the lives and fortunes of our children to a mass of voters who have been deprived of all opportunity for an education . . . who have been embittered by the robbery of their childhood, who are the material for the agitator, and the prey of the demagogue."

Mill men themselves were divided on the issue of child labor. Some firmly believed that hard work, commencing at a young age, was the best education available. Others championed the practice as a necessary evil in the natural progress of society. Daniel Augustus Tompkins traced the problem to the poverty caused by the Civil War, particularly to the resultant lack of educational opportunities. "In the absence of schools, the discipline of the mill and its training down to twelve years of age is much better for children than idleness and no discipline or training. . . . It would be far better to have ample school facilities and compel all children to go to school ten months in the
year, and give them the other two months for vacations and recreation. But in the absence of such facilities, the discipline and training of the mill is best for the children of working people." Whatever the personal feelings of mill men, their duties to their stockholders demanded that they oppose restrictions on the employment of children. The fact of the matter, as the president of the American Cotton Manufacturers Association admitted to McKelway, was that without the labor of boys and girls under the age of fourteen, Piedmont mills simply could not operate.

Bit by bit, reformers chipped away at the opposition. By 1913 North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia had laws that prohibited the employment of children under twelve and restricted the hours of labor for those below fourteen. Exemptions and lack of enforcement, however, enfeebled state regulations. The 1907-8 Bureau of Labor study found that an astounding 92 percent of the mills in South Carolina and 75 percent of those in North Carolina ignored child labor regulations. Flora McKinney's boss was one of those who paid little attention to the law. Her family moved to Lando, South Carolina, when she was nine or ten, and she soon followed her father into the mill. "When I got old enough, well, I really weren't old enough, but they'd take children to work then. We were supposed to be twelve years old before we could go to work, but I've hid from inspectors a lots of times. They'd come through and the section in front of us would send word to hide the kids, and we'd run to the water house. Then we'd all cram in there 'til they left."

Given the inadequacy of state legislation, members of the NCLC felt the need for federal action. To mobilize public opinion against child labor, the NCLC devised a highly effective propaganda campaign. Key to this effort were the photographs of Lewis Hine, which poignantly revealed the youthfulness of southern workers. Hine's images-of little girls dressed in long skirts and aprons and little boys wearing their workingmen's caps and suspenders, all swallowed up in rows of towering machines-became the crusade's symbols of the worst evils of industrialization. The NCLC convinced the public and members of Congress that the employment of children had to be stopped. In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson signed the Keating-Owen Child Labor bill to achieve that end.

Adamantly opposed to federal intervention, which might open the way to other protective laws and undermine their competitive advantage over the North, Southern industrialists fought back. When federal child labor legislation was first suggested, David Clark, editor of the Southern Textile Bulletin, organized mill owner opposition. The son of Walter Clark, who was chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court and one of the South's most liberal jurists, David Clark seemed an unlikely opponent of progressive reform. But as a young man, Clark embarked on a course quite different from his father's. After earning degrees in civil and mechanical engineering from the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts and Cornell University in the late 1890s, David entered the textile business, first as a mill designer and later as an investor. When his own mill failed in 1907, he turned to textile journalism. As founder and editor of the Southern Textile Bulletin, Clark gained a reputation as "a volunteer spokesman for an ultra-conservative philosophy in business and education matters" and "a stirrer-upper of no mean proportions." Shortly after passage of the Keating-Owen bill,
he arranged to test the constitutionality of the law. At Clark's behest, a Charlotte mill worker—perhaps fearful of losing his job, his children's earnings, or a combination of the two—petitioned the courts to restrain a local mill from discharging his two underage sons. A federal judge agreed that the law violated the rights of the worker, and a year later the Supreme Court concurred. The child labor law was dead.

Despite this setback, child labor gradually did decline, largely in response to changes in the industry and the growing supply of adult workers. The trend toward finer yarns, the integration of yarn spinning with cloth-weaving operations that required more strength and skill, and the technological advances of the 1920s all worked against the practice. By World War I the number of children under sixteen employed in the Carolinas had decreased to 6 percent of the total work force, almost the level in the leading New England textile states. Yet until 1938, when the federal Fair Labor Standards Act outlawed employment of children under sixteen, many southern industrialists skirted the law so as to make use of the mill village's young, and captive, work force.

Child labor involved more, however, than the exploitation of youth. There were stories behind the expressions captured on film by Lewis Hine, stories that fit neither the rationalizations of mill owners nor the fears of reformers. Mill work was a source of pride as well as pain, of fun as much as suffering; and children made choices, however hedged about by their parents' authority and their bosses' power.

For mill children, life was paced from the outset by the ringing of the factory bell. Working women, who often had to return to their jobs within a few weeks of childbirth, adapted their nursing schedule to breaks in the workday. "People used to go out," recalled Ada Mae Wilson. "They didn't have bottle babies like they do now. They nursed the breast. A lot healthier children. You'd come out at nine o'clock, and then at twelve you'd come home for lunch. And then at three they'd let you come back, and then you'd be off at six." If labor was scarce, a woman who had neither relatives nor older children at home might take her baby to the mill. Jessie Lee Carter had a neighbor with a nursing baby who would "take a quilt and lay that baby in her roping box while she worked. And she'd bring her baby down and keep it in the mill all day long."

As children got older, the mill was like a magnet, attracting their youthful curiosity and, all too soon, their labor. Until the 1920s no barbed wire fences, locked gates, or bricked-in windows separated the factory from the village. Children could easily wander in and out of the mill and their first "work" might be indistinguishable from play. After school and in the summers, Emma Williams accompanied her mother to the mill. "I'm sure I didn't work for the money. I just wanted to work, I reckon. Oodles of kids. All of us used to do it together. [We] didn't do much, and it was real fun. I guess maybe one reason that it was fun was because that was the only time we got with other children. When we stayed home, well, we stayed home."

Most children first learned about factory labor when they tagged along with a parent or sibling, carried hot meals to the mill at dinnertime, or stopped by after school. But this casual contact had serious consequences, for on such visits relatives began teaching children the skills they would need when they were old enough for jobs of their own. Ethel Faucette carried lunch to her sister. "While she was eating," Faucette
explained, "I learned how to work her job. I was already learned when I went to work." Geddes Dodson's father gave him specific chores during his daily visits. "When I was a little fellow, my daddy was a-working in the Poinsett Mill. He was a loom fixer. He'd run the weavers' looms through the dinner hour so they could go eat their dinner. We lived about a mile and a quarter from the mill, and I'd carry his lunch every day. He'd tell me to come on in the mill, and he made me fill his batteries while he run the weavers' looms-and I was just a little fellow. See, I knew a whole lot about the mill before I ever went in one."

"Helping," then, was a family affair, a form of apprenticeship by which basic skills and habits were transmitted to each new generation. But helping was also a vital part of the family economy and the mill labor system. A child's help could increase a parent's or older sibling's piecework earnings or simply relieve the strain of keeping up production. An Englishman who reported on the American textile industry visited a mill in South Carolina where weavers who had their sons or little brothers helping could take on two additional looms. Besides, with parents working twelve-hour days in the mills, children often had no place else to go. Owners profited from such family needs. Early child labor legislation in the Carolinas only prohibited "employing" children under certain ages, so owners could stay within the letter of the law by "permitting" or "suffering" underage children to "help." A story related by a federal investigator in Georgia illustrated the system's coercive potential. "A woman reported that her little daughter ten years old worked every day helping her sisters. The child quit for a while, but the overseer said to the mother, 'Bring her in; the two girls cannot tend those machines without her.' The mother asked that the child be given work by herself, but the overseer replied that the law would not permit it."

Given the laxity of enforcement, mill owners could essentially set their own policies according to individual conscience or the bottom line of profit and loss. Allie Smith provided a child's-eye view of the confusion that often resulted. Shortly after Allie's birth, her family moved to Saxapahaw, a community in Alamance County on the Haw River. By the time they left for Carrboro, in neighboring Orange County, when Allie was eleven, she knew how to spin from having helped an older sister. But Julian Shakespeare Carr, owner of the Carrboro mill, believed that mill men should voluntarily avoid child labor in order to stave off government interference. "When we moved to Carrboro," Allie recalled, "I thought I could go in and help her, and I did. But Mr. Carr owned this cotton mill, and I hadn't been over here long when he came over and said I couldn't come in and help. I would have to be on the payroll, so they put me on the payroll. And I worked there, I don't know how long- several months- and they said I couldn't work unless my father signed me up for being twelve years old. Well, he wouldn't do it. He said he didn't want me to work. They put me out and wouldn't let me work. And then when I got to be twelve, I went in and went to work."

Playing and helping could thus shade into full-time work. But getting that first official, full-time job was a major turning point. Managers, parents, and children themselves influenced the decision. Occasionally, mills openly dictated the age at which a child had to begin work. In 1904 the owners of a South Carolina mill mandated that "all children, members of a family about twelve years of age, shall work in the mill and
shall not be excused from service therein without the consent of the superintendent for good cause." More often, pressure came from supervisors, who were personally responsible for keeping a quota of workers on hand. Jessie Lee Carter was four in 1905 when her family left their Tennessee farm for the Brandon Mill in Greenville. Six of her older brothers and sisters went to work right away; eight years later Jessie joined them. "When I got twelve years old, my uncle [who was a second hand in the spinning room] come to my daddy, and daddy let me quit school and go to work." During slack times children like Jessie Lee could be sent back to school, then called in again when the need arose.

For a large family with many mouths to feed, outside pressure was often unnecessary. Lela Ranier's parents took her out of school when she was twelve and sent her to the mill. "Ma thought it was time. They thought maybe it would help 'em out, you know. They was making such a little bit. And they thought the little bit I made would help." Lacy Wright's father asked him to quit school when he reached twelve because his two oldest sisters had married and Lacy's father could not support the family on $1.25 a day. Other children realized the importance of their labor to the family's well-being and took it upon themselves to get a job. This was particularly true in families where the father was dead or disabled. Grover Hardin, for example, dropped out of school after the second grade. "I started out in the mill-the main reason-to help my mother. She wanted me to go to school until I got in the fifth grade. I told her, 'You need the help worse than I need the education, because I can get it later on, or I can do without it.' And so I went to work as quick as I possibly could. I started in as a sweeper."

Many parents wanted their children to stay in school, but youngsters often had their own plans. Ila Dodson insisted on quitting school when she was fourteen. "I wanted to make my own money. I done had two sisters go to work, and I seen how they was having money, and so I couldn't stand it no longer. My parents wanted me to go on to school, but I couldn't see that. Back then, didn't too many children go on to high school. It was just a common thing that when they'd get old enough, let them go to work. I like to worried them to death." Finally, Ila's parents relented and agreed to sign her worker's permit, required at that time in South Carolina for children under sixteen. But, she recalled, "Mama wouldn't even take me to town to get it, and my daddy wouldn't go with me. I said, 'Well, give me the Bible and give me a dime and I'll go get it.' A nickel streetcar fare up there and a nickel back, and I [took] the Bible because I had to prove my age."

Alice Evitt and Curtis Enlow also preferred mill work to schoolwork. "They'd let you go in there seven, eight years old," Alice recalled. "I'd go in there and mess around with my sisters; they'd be spinning. I liked to put up the ends and spin a little bit, so when I got twelve years old, I wanted to quit school. So I just quit and went to work, and I was twelve years old!" Both of Curtis's parents and two of his sisters worked in the card room at a Greenville mill. During summer vacation Curtis joined them there. "I was about thirteen years old, and I decided I would go to work. Well, I went to work, and my dad says if I quit when school started, he'd let me work. I went back to school, but I wasn't learning nothing- I didn't think I was. So I went and told him, and he says, 'All right, you ain't learning nothing. Well, you can go back to the mill.'"
Mamie Shue’s parents had better luck keeping her in school. Although North Carolina’s compulsory education law at the time required attendance only until age fourteen, Mamie’s folks used it to frighten her into staying in school until she was sixteen. “I hated school all my life. But my parents told me if I didn't go to school, they'd put my daddy in jail. And I loved my daddy to death. So I went to school 'til I was sixteen.” She did, however, start working after school in the spooling room. “I was fifteen when I started doing that. So when I was sixteen years old, they just give me a job, 'cause I could spool as good as the rest of them."

Learning to "spool as good as the rest of them" was often a by-product of helping in the mills, but for those who had not started out as helpers- and even for some who had- learning constituted a memorable initiation into shop floor life. Few mills had a formal training program. Instead, "they would put you with someone to train you," or "your parents would take you in and train you theirself." Parents and surrogate parents took time out from their own work, which sometimes cost money out of their pockets, to help the young learn a trade. "That’s the way the whole generation in Lando learned what they knowed," remembered John Guinn, "by the older generation." From the evidence of our interviews, adults did so willingly and well.

Mill managers expected children to master their jobs within a set length of time, usually about six weeks. During that period children worked for free or for a token wage. "I don't think they paid us anything to learn. But after we learnt, we got a job, a machine of our own." Some mills used this probationary period to take advantage of young people who were eager to work in the mill. Mary Thompson saw this happen in Greenville. "When I first went to work at Slater, they had boys to put up the warps on the back of the frames because they was heavy. They'd go out there in the country and get them boys and hire them and tell them they'd have to work six weeks without money. Well, that just tickled them to death, that they’d get a chance to work in a mill. And they'd work them six weeks, and they'd find something wrong with them and lay them off, and get other boys. And they run it a long time like that."

Almost all workers recalled proudly their ability to learn their jobs despite their youth. Naomi Trammell was an orphan when she went to work in the Victor Mill at Greer, South Carolina. "Well, I didn't know hardly about mill work, but I just went in and had to learn it. Really, I had to crawl up on the frame, because I wasn't tall enough. I was a little old spindly thing. I wasn't the only one, there's a whole place like that. And they had mothers and daddies [but they] wasn't no better off than I was. They had to learn us, but it didn't take me long to learn. They'd put us with one of the spinners and they'd show us how. It was easy to learn-all we had to do was just put that bobbin in there and put it up." Children learned quickly because most entry-level jobs required more dexterity than technical know-how. It took a while to be proficient, but most children could learn the rudiments of spinning, spooling, or doffing in a few weeks. . . .

Workers' health was another casualty of the drive for profits in a region that placed no restrictions on capital and offered workers no protection. Without unions, and without the legal and administrative apparatus that now provides a basic level of industrial health and safety, millhands were at the mercy of dangerous machinery. The threat to a worker's health could be as sudden and violent as the snapping of a bone or
as insidious as the relentless clouding of a lung. Cotton dust was a killer in the card room. "Some of that dust was terrible," Carl Durham remembered. "Whew! That dust would accumulate and you had to strip them cards out every three hours, get all that stuff out. It would get to where it wouldn't do its work, it would be so full of particles and dust. When I was coming along, and for a long time, that was all in the air. It's a wonder I can breathe, but somehow or another it didn't affect me like it did some folks. It just killed some folks." Durham's observations echoed the findings of medical researchers on both sides of the Atlantic. Cotton dust caused a number of health problems, sometimes resulting in death, but it did not affect everyone in the same way. It is now well understood that byssinosis, or brown lung, is a disease that results from prolonged exposure to cotton dust. Although the British government recognized the existence of byssinosis and began compensating victims in 1940, lack of research and resistance by the textile industry delayed any action on the disease in the United States until the 1970s.

Anyone who worked in the card room knew that the dust caused problems, but, like Grover Hardin, they "didn't pay much attention to it. See, there was a continuous fog of dust in the carding department at all times. When you hit the mill on Monday morning, you'd have a tough time. You'd cough and sneeze and fill your mouth full of tobacco and anything else to keep this dust from strangling you." This "Monday morning sickness" was the first stage of byssinosis, caused by irritation of the air passages. There would be little recurrence of the problem during the rest of the week as workers adjusted to the dust. But the coughing returned every Monday because a day or two away from the mill increased "susceptibility." After a period of ten years or more, the coughing became more persistent. Grover Hardin "got to noticing it bothering me. I took these coughs and I couldn't get over them, and I'd go home and cough and cough and cough." Rather than pay doctor's fees, he asked the advice of other workers who had the same problem—"the ones that was able to go to the doctor, I'll put it like that." Most told him they had "a little touch of asthma," so Grover took "home remedies" for asthma. "As time passed on, it'd get worse. On Mondays, I'd go in and it'd sure enough be worse by the night. Tuesday, Wednesday, it'd get a little better. I guess I'd get my lungs plugged up good. Over the weekend you'd clear your lungs up pretty good, then Monday morning, it'd be the same thing."

Like many workers with byssinosis, Hardin gradually began having difficulty running his job and started missing work. "Nothing I could take for asthma would do this breathing any good. I couldn't get no air in my lungs, and I slowed up. It got to where I had to push on the job to stay up in the mill. And when I'd get a spare minute I'd go over and lay in the windows and get all the air I could." Finally, he had to quit.

Dust was only one hazard in the card room. Accidents around the machinery mangled hands and arms; one worker called carding the "dangerousest job in the mill." In the early days, belts connected the machines to drive shafts high above, and carders had to pay careful attention as they cleaned and adjusted their equipment. "It was pretty dangerous," explained Carl Thompson. "You'd have to watch yourself. There were so many things that you could do. Even cleaning up, if maybe your brush would get caught in a belt or a pulley, it's going to jerk your hand. I've seen them jerked in the
cards thataway and maybe get their whole arm and all broke and the skin pulled off, maybe slam through the bone."

One incident in particular accounted for Thompson's fears. "I'd seen so many get hurt on them, get their arms broke. That was when they had overhead pulleys, had the pulleys at the top of the mill. There was one man, his shirt or something or other got caught in that belt, and that belt threwed him to the top of the mill and busted his brains out. He just hit the ceiling of the mill. They had big beams up there, and he hit them, right at the back of his head. It killed him."

Working conditions were even more disagreeable in the weave room. The environment was dominated by the constant noise of banging looms and the eerie mist that descended from overhead sprinklers. "It was a loud, noisy place, and awful dusty and linty," remembered Edna Hargett. The moisture was particularly troublesome. "The weave room was always wet," explained Mack Duncan. "Back then, you had to have a lot of water in the weave room. The air wasn't conditioned like it is now, scientifically; there was just water being sprayed out. It was atomized and sprayed out to make the weaving run. It was wet in the back alley. There was a loom fixer taking a loom down one time, and he slipped and grabbed at the beam on the rail, and the beam probably weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, maybe more. It was above him, and it fell on him and killed him."

Less dramatic than occasional accidents, but no less threatening, were the complications that resulted from breathing warm, moist air filled with lint. Naomi Trammell was one of the fortunate ones; she had a doctor who recognized the problem. "I went to the weave room one time, and I like to took galloping TB. It'd be just wet all over, so hot, you know. And that just give 'em TB. That doctor told me when he doctored me about two weeks, 'Now, young lady, you can go back to the cloth room and live, or you can go back to the weave room and die, whichever you want to do.' So I went back to the cloth room."

Spinning had its own peculiar hazards. "Oh, it was awful hot," Alice Evitt remembered. "All that machinery a-runnin' makin' heat. It was bad. Terrible hot out here. You'd come out of there, your clothes was plumb wet." Mozelle Riddle described conditions in the Bynum mill. "It used to be so hot before they put air-conditioning in there. You could walk into the frames and burn your legs, that's how hot the heat was. Them motors'd burn you, when you'd walk around them. But we just got used to it. Didn't think nothing about it. It'd be eighty, oh shoot, it'd be ninety degrees in there in that spinning room. Work and sweat, yes sir." Eva Hopkins recalled the heat, too. "They didn't have air-conditioning in the mills and it was terribly hot. They wouldn't let you raise the windows very high: air would come in; it would make the ends come down. Sometimes they'd let you prop a bobbin under them. I'd put the window up at the end of my frame, then here'd come the section man along and take it down. When he'd leave and go off, I'd raise it again. I couldn't stand the heat."

The threat of serious injuries was all around. Most of the fast-moving machine parts were exposed, and any slip-up could have disastrous consequences. Alice Evitt remembered getting her "apron tore off two or three times a week" while running speeder frames. "Back then, they didn't wear pants. Them big flyers flyin' around, they'd
grab you and just wind your apron plumb up. I was just lucky I managed to stop 'em and didn't get my arms in them. Them flyers would break your bones. I know one lady- I didn't see her get it done- but she said she wore wigs [because] she'd got her hair caught and it pulled her whole scalp out- every bit of her hair. Them speeders was bad to catch you." Evitt and her co-workers often joked about such things. "Sometimes they'd get under the frames and reach and get a-hold of somebody's dress and jerk 'em. Make 'em think the machine had 'em. Try to scare them."

When accidents did occur, there was little relief for those who suffered. "Back before now," Mack Duncan recalled, "if you got hurt on the job, you just was hurt. If you couldn't work, you had to go home; you lost your pay. Back before World War II you didn't get much help." James Pharis remained bitter about the way he was treated when he had an accident in the mill. "I was about nine or ten years old when I got that hand hurt. I was riding on an elevator rope in the mill. My hand got caught under the wheel. That thing was mashed into jelly; all of it was just smashed to pieces. They took me down to the company store- the drugstore was in the front end of the company store- never even notified my people or nothing. There were only two doctors in town at that time, and both of them was out of town on country calls. I sat there until about four o'clock. Nobody done nothing in the world for me. My people was never notified. Nothing said about it. You tear yourself all to pieces then, nothing said about getting anything out of it. Poor people like us, no use in suing. Poor people didn't stand a chance. If you done anything the company didn't like, they'd just fire you and tell the rest of [the owners] not to hire you. So there'd you be. People who lived under them circumstances, back in them days, was nothing they could do. So they didn't try to do nothing."

Lloyd Davidson summed up the situation. "The only insurance back then they had was to protect the company. They looked out for the company interest, but you didn't have any benefit. There was no retirement, no hospitalization, no benefits whatsoever, as far as for helping you. They carried insurance to protect the company. [People] probably have [sued], but it's a losing cause when you do. They have their own lawyers and they always have the upper hand, you might say. Kind of like David and Goliath. I reckon you could put it that way." . . .