

Jennifer Karl

## Proposal

I am applying for a Levitt Summer Research Fellowship with Professor Lisa Trivedi to fund our research project, “The health of women textile workers in Lancashire and Lowell.” During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution led to the rapid growth of two textile manufacturing centers, Lancashire in Great Britain and Lowell in the United States. These mills depended on female labor, and families in turn increased their dependence on women’s mill earnings to maintain their standard of living (Beneson 628). The workers themselves, however, faced long hours and unsafe and unhygienic conditions. The female textile workers and middle-class women created organizations that provided welfare programs, fought for better working conditions and more just wages, and championed for welfare legislation (Koven and Michel 1083).

The focus of my summer research will be to identify and analyze the historiography pertaining to the women textile workers’ health and to the labor and welfare organizations that responded to their concerns, focusing on Lancashire and Lowell from approximately 1860 to 1930. I will use the books and articles available in and through the Hamilton College Library, libraries in the Greater Boston area, and the British archives online to find specific information on the workers’ health (illness, maternity, mortality, hospitals) and social action (organizations, journals, legislation). I also plan to visit Lowell to explore the city’s textile mills, museums, and archival opportunities, particularly at the Lowell National Historical Park and the University of Massachusetts Lowell Center for Lowell History. I will also identify other, future primary sources for both me and Professor Trivedi, in Lowell and Lancashire, respectively.

In addition collecting data and considering the women workers’ health needs and concerns, I will also consider the emergence of public health services and legislation for lower-

income individuals. Koven and Michel suggest that the female-led social welfare programs and private organizations in both the United States and Great Britain influenced the formation of the welfare state (1076-83, 1107). How did the state and federal governments borrow from and build upon these private female organizations? What rhetoric did they use to enact welfare programs, particularly maternal and infant welfare laws? To what extent did the health needs and concerns of the women workers actually match the services that the mills, private organizations, and governments provided? I will conclude with a brief consideration of the current policies and effectiveness of contemporary welfare programs.

This grant presents a unique opportunity for me to work with Professor Trivedi and intimately explore an aspect of women's health and the public policy which developed in response to women's health needs as workers. I will devote ten weeks of the summer to my research project, dividing my time between Hamilton College, where I will live in college housing and work side-by-side with Professor Trivedi, and eastern Massachusetts. When I am not at Hamilton, I plan to write one to two page précis on secondary sources and, at the end of the summer, write approximately ten pages on historiography. My summer work will serve as the foundation for my senior thesis in history, which I plan to complete in the fall 2008. The research with Professor Trivedi will contribute to her scholarly work and aid in the creation of a new history course, The History of Work, which Professor Trivedi plans to teach in the spring 2009.

## Bibliography

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