

## 18-15 John Hill, *Testimony on the Southern Textile Industry* (1883)

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*In the 1880s the center of the nation's textile industry began to shift from New England to the southern Piedmont region. Lower wage rates and close access to raw materials attracted increasing numbers of textile manufacturers. Conditions in southern textile mills were extremely harsh, and most mill towns were thoroughly dominated by company agents and plant superintendents. Southern mills employed large numbers of women and children from the surrounding towns and countryside. A transplanted northerner, John Hill, was a mechanical engineer for the Eagle and Phoenix Manufacturing Company in Columbus, Georgia. SOURCE: Report of the Committee of the Senate upon the Relations between Labor and Capital, 48th Congress, 4 (1885).*

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Now as to the efficiency of labor in the two sections. The Southern operative is native born, while the average Northern operative is not. They have got more Canadian operatives in Manchester, N.H., than they have natives. Now, as it is a well-known fact to all who have studied the subject, the elements of mind, the general mental make-up and intelligence of the native American exceeds by far the average of like qualities in the lower classes of foreigners, the classes who immigrate into this country to work in mills. So in the same proportion are you likely to find the comparative intelligence of the Northern and the Southern operatives, the Southern being native and the Northern being a foreigner. There is more endurance in the constitution in a cold climate than in a warm one, and our advantage becomes a disadvantage in this respect, where it is a question of hard, heavy labor. Natural laws would therefore indicate that for heavy labor the Northern operative would be superior to the Southern, but while this is true, it is also true that a warm climate develops the human system earlier, and makes the action of both mind and body quicker than in a cold climate. The natives of warm climates are more impulsive, quicker to learn, and quicker in action, though not so enduring. This climate advances the period of manhood or womanhood fully a year and a half over the average climate of New England, so far as development is concerned. A man or a woman here in Columbus is as far advanced in physical development at fifteen years of age as a like person would be in Lowell at sixteen and a half years of age.

Now, for cotton manufacturing, capacity to endure hard labor is not a material point, because the labor is not hard. The motions required are quick rather than laborious, except in certain departments. In weaving there is probably about as much of one kind as the other, and, of course, weaving is a very important department.

It may be stated as a general fact, therefore, that in this regard the advantages in the South are at least equal to those in the North.

In the matter of education the native American of the North averages superior to the native of the South, owing to the fact that for many years, covering the lives of all the operatives now in the mills of the North, the free-school system has been universal there, and the necessity of education has been generally and fully appreciated. In the South, while a free-school system does exist in this State, yet it is not so far advanced as the free-school system in New England; not so liberal; not so easy to be availed of. It furnishes less school accommodation in proportion to population, and there is less disposition on the part of the people to patronize it, and, generally speaking, owing to the very limited time it has been in existence, the advantages of our free-school system here have not been reaped by our people to an extent that will at all compare with the benefits that the New England system has conferred upon the people there.

But again, as compared with foreign help, the probabilities are that even in the matter of education our Southern operatives have the advantage. In Alabama, South Carolina, and

other States, where no attention has been paid to the free-school system, the operatives have not had the advantages that they have in Georgia.

The hours of labor in cotton manufacture in the Eagle and Phoenix mills average eleven per day, but in many mills they average twelve per day. In New England, in some of the States, the law prescribes ten hours as a day's work. That is so in Massachusetts, but not in New Hampshire....

I might state that all mill operatives having to do with the process of cotton manufacturing involving quick perception and manipulation are white. In portions of the work, where it is only a question of muscle, and where intelligence is not a necessity, the laborers employed are either black or white, the preference, where it comes to a matter of mere muscle, being given to the colored laborer. I refer now to rolling a bale of cotton in, tearing it open, tumbling around boxes and bales, and such heavy work. It has been found, and is a fact patent to all who have studied the question, that the employment of colored labor in the finer processes of manufacturing is a question which is mooted only by those who know nothing about it...It may be regarded as a fact about which those who understand the question can have no dispute, that it will be many years before the present condition of things can be changed. There are places to which each of these labor elements is specially adapted. The supply of both races is about equal to the demand, and there is an opportunity for support and for fair and reasonable prosperity open to one race as well as to the other.

There is a good feeling existing between the employers and the employed, both white and black, at the South, which is not equaled in any other section of this country, or in Europe either. There are no strikes here, no rebellions of the laborers, no disposition on the part of labor to combine against capital, and no disposition on the part of capital to oppress labor. Everything is in harmony, and a state of harmony and of prosperity in this respect exists which is to be found in no other place in the civilized world to the same extent as in the cotton States of the South. That is caused by the fact that there is a liberality upon the part of the employers which dispenses justice to the employed willingly and cheerfully, and without compulsion. This fact is recognized by the employees, and where there is justice between capital and labor, and no oppression, there is, of course, no necessity for collisions, strikes, or animosities....

Now, I will make another statement which will probably be interesting to people who do not live here. The cotton States of the South are the only portion of the United States where whites and blacks work together upon the same work at the same pay and under the same regulations, the only part of this country where the two races will work side by side, justice being rendered to each, and the laborers of both races working in harmony and in unison, without rebellion and with mutual goodwill. I employed on mill No. 3 from fifty to seventy-five brick masons, and probably from fifteen to twenty rock masons. The men of both races were mixed, working side by side, black and white. They were paid equal wages, and there was perfect harmony between them and equal proficiency except in cases where special acquirements were necessary on special work, and, in one instance, for considerable length of time, a state of facts existed that could not exist in any other country in the world, viz, that the entire lot of laborers were superintended by a colored man. You can't see anything like that in New England, can you? But what I say of the harmonious relations between the laborers of the two races has particular reference to Georgia, and other States where the races have not been antagonized by violent political agitations in the past....

I have been simply calling attention to the fact that we can do here what you cannot do there; that is, we can work the two races together on the same work in harmony, and I say

again that you could not do that in the mines of Pennsylvania, in the rolling mills of Pittsburgh, in the manufacturing establishments of New York, or upon the buildings of New York, Boston, or Chicago. You could not find or get up in any of those places the same harmonious feeling which exists here between the races to-day.

The CHAIRMAN. Then it is not really the race question at all. It is simply this that such a large part of your working population is colored that if you should undertake to exclude them from your labor market there would be nobody to do the work, and therefore, there being sufficient employment for both races, they work quietly alongside of each other, neither feeling that it is necessary to compete with the other for employment.

The WITNESS. Well, always, both before the war and since the war, there has been a better feeling between the two races here than at the North. The question of race, the question of the color of a man's face, does not arise at all in reference to this kind of labor, but in the North it does come in, and the consequence is that you find it impossible there to work the two races together harmoniously as we do here. I simply state this as a fact not generally known by parties at the North who have not investigated it....

It is only in the proper place that the two races can come together harmoniously. They don't come together in the dining-room, they don't come together in society, but there is a place where they can come together harmoniously, and that is right down on this basis where it is a question of labor, and where the common sentiment of the people is that the two races are equal. So far as regards this question of such labor as can earn 60 or 70 cents a day, there is perfect equality between white and black labor here in the South. But that does not mean at all social equality. It has nothing to do with politics or with social equality or anything of the kind. It means just 75 cents a day for a day's work, whether the laborer is white or black, or \$2.50 a day for a black mason, and \$2.50 for a white mason. We have two blacksmiths at work at the Eagle and Phoenix mill, one of them being white and the other black, and they are on an equality in wages and in work. One of them is a very intelligent white man and the other is a very intelligent colored man. The question of equality does not come up with reference to those two men at all. They are both just blacksmiths working at \$2.50 a day each, and drawing that amount of wages at the end of the week, and that is all there is to it. We do not mix the races in the machine shop. It is done only where there seems to be a certain suitability in it. We do it on our rock walls and our brick walls, and among our carpenters, and we pay each one at the same rate for equal work.

Q. And give neither race the preference in selecting the men to be employed?—A. If I want a man to do certain things I want a colored man every time, while, on the other hand, if I want a man to do certain other things, I want a white man. I don't know that it hinges on the question of the whiteness or blackness of the man's skin; it hinges rather on the adaptability of the man to do the particular work that is required.

Q. Now, what have you to say to us in regard to child labor in factories?—A. Well, the child labor question is different here from what it is in the North, for sundry reasons. In the first place, it is a lamentable fact that parents here do not recognize the necessity of education to the extent that they do in the North. In the North all the people, including all the laboring classes, think it a duty to have their children educated, and the facilities which the free-school system gives them for that purpose are very largely used. Perhaps the laws of the Northern States regulate the matter somewhat; but laws are second to facts, and if the sentiment of the people did not justify such laws they would not be made. Then, too, a law that would be good in that regard in Massachusetts would not be good for anything in Alabama. You must adapt your laws to the State and conditions of society. Suppose you should pass a law in Alabama that, up to a certain age, children should not work because

they must go to school, it wouldn't be good for anything; for the reason that, in the first place, even if they did not work, they would not go to school, because the parents would not want to send them, and also because if they did there are no schools to which they could send them generally. Again, on the other hand, that is not true of Georgia. Of course, I am now speaking only of the average. There are many people here who would be very apt and anxious to educate their children, and who would be very glad to send them to school. There are many who do send their children to school wherever they have the opportunity, but there are many others who do not; from want of thrift, or from the fact which does not exist elsewhere in this country, that the devastation produced by the war has swept away the material prosperity of the people and probably set them back fifty years in that respect, and as a consequence they are unable to educate their children as they would wish. For these reasons, and also because of the fact generally admitted, that economy is not one of the strongest points of the Southern people, there are a great many parents who would be glad to send their children to school, but who have not the opportunity or the means, being compelled to keep the children employed in procuring the necessaries of life.

In regard to the small children, more especially those in our spinning room, they are worth all they are paid, and the fact is that the wages they earn are a necessity for the support of the families from which the children come; so that if they were turned out there would be suffering upon the part of those families for want of that income. We do not really employ those children as a matter of preference, but as a matter of necessity. When a family comes here and a portion of them go to work in the mill they are sure to make application for employment for all their children who are of sufficient age to go to work in the mill, and they persist in those applications until those children are employed.

Q. At what ages are the children employed?—A. About ten years, I believe, is the youngest age at which we employ them.

Q. What do children of ten years and upward do?—A. They do this very light work, attending the spinning and winding machinery—very light work. There is no work that those children do that is sufficiently arduous to over-tax them or to interfere with their health or development. Their work is all light, and the only thing that can tax them is perhaps the hours of labor....

1. According to Hill, how and why is the southern textile workforce superior to that in the north?
2. How does he compare black labor with immigrant labor? How does he differentiate southern race relations inside and outside of the mill?
3. How does Hill justify the growing use of child labor in the southern textile industry?