

Children at Work: A Brief Look Quotations

1. “I worked in a factory where they made oil cans and tea-caddies. This was the first place where I saw children from 8 to 12 years old work like slaves, working on machines; most every day it happened that a finger or hand was cut off, but what did it matter, they were paid off and sent home, and others would take their places. I believed that children working in factories has for the last twenty years made more cripples than the war with the south, and the cut off fingers and mangled bodies brought gold to the monopolies and manufacturers. How often has the sweat of a poor man or child paid for the silk dress of a kept woman of these men, whose only desire is ‘to have lots of fun and a good time’.”

Oscar Neebe, *Autobiography of Oscar Neebe* (1887)

2. “There are, in the United States, according to the latest census (1900), 580,000 children between the ages of ten and fourteen years, who cannot read nor write. They are not the immigrant children. They are our own native-born children. We have two millions under the age of sixteen who are earning their own livings.”

Jane Addams, *Newer Ideals* (1907)

3. “Child labor and poverty are inevitably bound together and if you continue to use the labor of children as the treatment for the social disease of poverty, you will have both poverty and child labor to the end of time.”

Grace Abbott (American Social Worker & Child Labor Reformer Director, Children’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor 1917–1934)

4. “Just because a child’s parents are poor or uneducated is no reason to deprive the child of basic human rights to health care, education and proper nutrition.”

Marian Wright Edelman, American children’s rights activist and president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund

5. “Little girls and boys, barefooted, walked up and down between the endless rows of spindles, reaching thin little hands into the machinery to repair

snapped threads. They crawled under machinery to oil it. They replaced spindles all day long, all day long; night through, night through. Tiny babies of six years old with faces of sixty did an eight-hour shift for ten cents a day. If they fell asleep, cold water was dashed in their faces; and the voice of the manager yelled above the ceaseless racket and whirl of the machines.

Toddling chaps of four years old were brought to the mills to "help" the older sister or brother' of ten years but their labor was not paid.

The machines, built in the north, were low for the hands of little children.

At five-thirty in the morning, long lines of little grey children came out of the early dawn into the factory, into the maddening noise, into the lint filled rooms. Outside the birds sang and the blue sky shone. At the lunch half-hour, children would fall to sleep over their lunch of cornbread and fat pork. They would lie on the bare floor and sleep. Sleep was their recreation, their release, as play is to the free children. The boss would come along and shake them awake. After the lunch period, the hour-in grind, the ceaseless running up and down between the whirring spindles. Babies, tiny children!"

Excerpt from *The Autobiography of Mother Jones*

6.

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We have, in this country, two million children under the age of sixteen years who are earning their bread. They vary in age from six and seven years (in the cotton mills of Georgia) and eight, nine and ten years (in the coal-breakers of Pennsylvania), to fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years in more enlightened states.

No other portion of the wage earning class increased so rapidly from decade to decade as the young girls from fourteen to twenty years. Men increase, women increase, youth increase, boys increase in the ranks of the breadwinners; but no contingent so doubles from census period to census period (both by percent and by count of heads), as does the contingent of girls between twelve and twenty years of age. They are in commerce, in offices, in manufacturing.

Tonight while we sleep, several thousand little girls will be working in textile mills, all the night through, in the deafening noise of the spindles and the looms spinning and weaving cotton and wool, silks and ribbons for us to buy.

by Florence Kelley

Speaks Out on Child Labor and Woman Suffrage

"There is work that profits children, and there is work that brings profit only to employers. The object of employing children is not to train them, but to get high profits from their work."

-- Lewis Hine, 1908

