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Workers and Work

For many workers, employment at Endicott Johnson began in hope—the hope of an immigrant for more money, of an anthracite miner for a safer and more secure life, of an unemployed worker for a job, of a country girl for escape from the closed world of a rural hamlet. Thousands of similar expectations drew workers into the firm in the early decades of the century and continued to do so through the 1920s and 1930s.

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In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the company's labor force had been drawn mainly from rural New York counties, from Pennsylvania, and from nearby New England states. Perhaps 15–20 percent of the labor force were immigrants, the majority coming from Ireland and Germany.¹ Beginning in the late 1890s and into the first two decades of the new century, the identity of the company's work force underwent important changes. Native-born workers continued to predominate, with ever-growing numbers coming north from Pennsylvania. Increasingly, however, southern and eastern European immigrants came streaming in, transforming the work force into a highly diverse population composed of Slovaks, Czechs, Italians, Poles, Russians, and Lithuanians, as well as the older ethnic and native groups.

With the extensive construction of tanneries and factories in the second decade of the century and the expansion of employment opportunities in Endicott, Italians and Slavs flocked into the village and took positions in the new plants. Their presence in large numbers in the tanneries provided the firm with a cheap and convenient labor force willing to do work natives avoided. As George F. Johnson acknowledged: "These 'new Americans' have done much to make this community what it is today, through the fact that they have been willing to do the character and kind of work . . . tannery work . . . which the average American has refused to do."²

By the early 1920s, when data on the national origins of the company's

TABLE 3-1
Endicott Johnson Workers—by Nationality (1922)

Nationality	Number	Percent of Total Labor Force	Percent of All Foreign Nationalities
American	9,143	67%	—
"Slavish"	1,901	14%	42%
Italian	982	7%	22%
Polish	492	4%	11%
Russian	254	2%	6%
Lithuanian	242	2%	5%
English	103	1%	2%
Greek	87	1%	2%
German	66	1%	1%
Irish	58	1%	1%
Ukrainian	50	1%	1%
Austrian	47	1%	1%
Armenian	46	1%	1%
Other	191	1%	4%
Total	13,665		
Total foreign nationalities	4,522	33%	

NOTE: Employment officers were inconsistent in categorizing "Slavish" immigrants. In some cases they were identified as Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs, Poles, Russians; in other cases they were simply listed as Slavs (the more common practice). Note also that due to rounding errors, totals do not add up to 100 percent.

SOURCE: *E-J Workers Magazine* 1 (Nov. 1922).

workers were first compiled and published, foreign-born workers made up one-third of the firm's labor force. (See table 3-1.) The imposition of immigration restrictions in the 1920s and afterward slowed the influx of foreign workers and reduced the overall proportion of foreign-born in the firm. Nevertheless, secondary migrations from such cities as New York, Akron, Utica, Pittsburgh, and Scranton, as well as from numerous smaller communities, continued to bring new immigrants into the firm's factories and tanneries.³ In addition to this a large, and ever-growing, number of native-born children of immigrant parentage also found employment in the company. By the mid-1930s probably half of the firm's workers were immigrants or second-generation ethnics.⁴

Slavs constituted the largest immigrant ethnic group at Endicott Johnson, making up about 20 percent of the labor force in 1922. Within this diverse group—composed of Poles, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs, and Russians—the Slovaks were the most numerous. Early migrants had come up from Pennsylvania, continuing a chain migration that had as its source the western Slovak

province of Nitra. Agricultural villages such as Gbely and Petrovah Ves, as well as various other proximate hamlets in the Nitra province, figured prominently as the roots of the earliest migrations. Gbely itself, by 1919, had contributed about 20 percent of Binghamton's Slovak population, and the Nitra province as a whole was probably responsible for half of the community's Slovak residents.⁵ Along with Nitra Slovaks came Moravian Czechs, Galician Poles, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and numerous other Slavic sub-groups, many also coming via chain or family migrations.⁶

Italians first arrived in the community in the 1870s, but their numbers remained insignificant until the first decade of the new century. Like many of their Slav counterparts, Italians followed fellow villagers and kinfolk to new opportunities of employment. Townspeople from small villages like Reggio, in Calabria, or Montaldo, in Piemonte, followed one another to Binghamton and Endicott. Immigrants who arrived in America and found "lucrative" jobs might write to friends or former village neighbors in Italy, as one worker did, that "here you can make your fortune. . . . If you can keep in good health you can make about 1000 *lire* a day, just like nothing."⁷

Family and village networks promoted and eased the migration and settlement of the new immigrants. The majority came indirectly to the firm, first finding employment in various jobs in New York and Pennsylvania—in mines, tanneries, or on railroad gangs. Heads of families, perhaps accompanied by sons or brothers, took jobs at Endicott Johnson for a year or two, went back to their native lands to pay off debts or to relieve a growing homesickness, and then returned for another few years. They generally boarded with kin or fellow countrymen and countrywomen. Many who made the return voyage to the "old country" never came back to America. Others, finding their hopes satisfied by employment in Endicott Johnson, sent for their wives and children and rooted themselves in the community.⁸

Most of the newly arrived European workers settled in the north side of Endicott ("across the railroad tracks") and in the northwest section of Binghamton, in the First Ward. Johnson City, populated mainly by native-born Protestants and some second-generation Irish-Americans, drew only a few new immigrant families in the early decades of the century.⁹ But through the late 1910s and early 1920s, with Endicott Johnson managers building homes in Johnson City for workers—homes that were not closed to immigrants by restrictive housing clauses or covenants—a modest but growing Slavic population established itself in the north side of the village and continued to expand through the next decade.¹⁰

Ethnic prejudice, both reflected in and fueled by the geographic separation of workers into various immigrant and native neighborhoods, led to a great deal of tension among ethnic groups in the early years of the century. Feuds between Irish and Italians, as well as between native-born Protestants and immigrant Catholics, occasionally broke out in Binghamton and Endicott.¹¹

The new immigrants' relatively low position in the factory hierarchy and their equally low wages (in comparison with native-born workers) exacerbated these tensions. In one case an Italian worker shot and killed a native after the latter taunted him by yelling out, "The dirty dago, he works for 50 cents a day."¹² In another incident a native leather cutter (it was rare for an Italian or Slav to be a leather cutter in the first decade of the century) and an Italian stitching room employee came into conflict in their haste to punch out on a factory time clock. The incident precipitated a feud between the two men that, partially fueled by ethnic animosities, finally ended in the Italian attacking the American with a knife and hatchet.¹³

In time the worst manifestations of ethnic and religious conflicts disappeared. Neighborhood gangs still clashed in the 1920s and 1930s, and ethnic slurs could still be heard in the community and in the factories, but serious physical violence grew rare. Part of this was due to a growing familiarity that arose naturally between the natives and new ethnics as they mixed in public schools and in work, but part should also be credited to the tempering influence of George F. Johnson, who acted as an effective intermediary between natives and immigrants, and whose progressive, cultural-pluralist viewpoint did much to assuage ethnic tensions in the community and in the factories.¹⁴

Eastern and southern European immigrants and their native-born children faced not only community prejudice but also employment discrimination. Slavs and Italians were overrepresented in tannery jobs. This was not merely a product of "pull" factors—the rising demand for unskilled labor in the tanneries and the fact that the lowest paying tannery jobs paid better than the lowest paying shoe-factory jobs—but also reflected exclusionary hiring practices in the factories. The best factory jobs—upper leather cutting, Goodyear stitching, bed lasting, edge trimming—generally went to natives.¹⁵ Native-born foremen skipped over Italians or Slavs in making selections for choice positions. As a result, in the factories, immigrants initially were placed in low-skilled, low-paying menial jobs such as rack pushing, stitching, lacing, tack pulling, and general labor. Finding themselves in such jobs and aware that better paying work was available in the tanneries, many elected to transfer. In the tanneries, too, they were usually placed in the least desirable jobs—on "wet work" in the beamhouse or the tanyard—where they came into daily contact with caustic bleaching and tanning agents. Many were satisfied with such work and the relatively good wages that it paid. Others were not. "First I had a good job upstairs," recounted one Italian tannery worker in 1910, "then the boss put me downstairs in the water and I went back to New York."¹⁶ Of course, there were some immigrants who did get good jobs. Most likely they came into the firm with some experience in tanning or shoe manufacturing, which they had obtained in the "old country" or in some other American factory.¹⁷

Other desirable jobs in the corporation were equally unavailable to recent

immigrants. For example, there were few eastern and southern Europeans to be found in the mechanical divisions of the company, which included electricians, plumbers, and powerhouse engineers. A typical power plant staff in the middle of the second decade of the century included two engineers with Anglo-Saxon surnames, three coal handlers and firemen with Slavic surnames, and one coal handler with an Anglo-Saxon surname. A list of nineteen electricians working in the Lestershire (Johnson City) plant contained only Anglo-Saxon surnames.¹⁸

Promotions to supervisory positions were also generally reserved for natives. In the first four decades of the century, a foreman who was not of Anglo-Saxon, German, or Irish ancestry was extremely rare. A list of foremen in the Pioneer Factory in 1915 disclosed not a single Slavic or Italian surname.¹⁹ In fact, such conditions persisted through the early 1940s. A 1941 list of superintendents and supervisors employed by Endicott Johnson contained relatively few Slavic and Italian surnames. Even in the tanneries, where eastern and southern Europeans were heavily concentrated, the vast majority of the supervisory personnel had Anglo-Saxon, German, or Irish surnames.²⁰ Considering that Slavs and Italians, both foreign-born and second or third generation, made up about two-fifths of the company's labor force, this certainly suggests that ethnic prejudice limited promotional opportunities at least until the early 1940s. While the company greeted foreign-born workers and their children with open arms, it did not readily promote them.

Eventually, Slavs and Italians did make their way into the more skilled and higher-paying factory and tannery jobs, as well as into supervisory positions, making it easier for those who followed them to do likewise.²¹ Entry into skilled work like cutting, edge trimming, and bed lasting came earliest in newly built factories where large numbers of natives had not previously established a firm footing. But by the late 1930s, Italians and Slavs were to be found in most of the choice factory jobs throughout the corporation.²² Furthermore, as many Anglo-Saxon Protestants (as well as German and Irish ethnics) left relatively good shoe-factory jobs and supervisory positions and entered even better-paying industrial jobs during World War II or flocked into the expanding International Business Machines (IBM) plants that were located in Endicott, they were replaced by Italians and Slavs. As one Italian worker, who had broken into cutting in 1931, summed up: "At first, for the Italians, it was kind of rough to get the good jobs like edge trimming jobs. Now you got a lot of Italians on all jobs. It's altogether different. But us guys were the first ones around."²³

While immigrant workers significantly added to Endicott Johnson's labor force in the early decades of the century, they were nonetheless still far outnumbered by the native born. By this time the latter included second- and third-generation assimilated German ethnics, Irish-Americans, and a large population of native-born Protestants of Anglo-Saxon ancestry. The corpora-

tion drew thousands of its employees from rural farming and mining regions in New York and Pennsylvania, as well as from small industrial towns scattered throughout these two states. In 1916, for example, the "Fourth Annual Reunion of Hillsgrove and Sullivan County, Pennsylvania" was held at Ideal Park in Endicott. The reunion drew 102 of the 200 migrants who had left that northeastern Pennsylvania county (which lay thirty miles to the southwest of Endicott) and who settled in Endicott, Johnson City, or Binghamton. As the local Endicott paper noted, "Nearly all the heads of these families work for the Endicott-Johnson Co."²⁴

Hillsgrove was one of many tannery towns nestled in the northern Pennsylvania forests. Like other tannery towns—Elkland, Towanda, Ralston—it sent out a steady stream of dissatisfied or unemployed workers who had heard of the better job opportunities at Endicott Johnson.²⁵ William Haight's family probably typified the pattern of these migrations. His father was employed by the Hillsgrove tannery and had come up to Endicott to take a job with the company. Haight recalled that the corporation had a good reputation among the Hillsgrove tanners. Other workers who had left the community and obtained jobs in Endicott came back and told former coworkers about the fine conditions and the better wages available up north. The Haight family, convinced by such reports, finally made the move in 1914. Most of the children, as their father had, ultimately entered the tanneries.²⁶ Another Endicott Johnson worker, from Morris, Pennsylvania, recalled a very similar version of his family's move to Endicott:

Well, down in Pennsylvania . . . Dad was driving a team down there and hauling bark to the tannery. That was almost petered out. They heard about Endicott here and a couple of others—the Hanly family and a fellow by the name of Flynn—well, the Hanlys had already come up here, and they wrote to this Flynn and told him what opportunities there was, and Dad and Mike Flynn—they came up here in 1902. And so we moved up here. He drove a team for a while . . . then he got a job in the tannery.²⁷

More important sources of native-born Endicott Johnson workers were the numerous farming regions that surrounded Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott. Thousands of surviving Endicott Johnson employment applications listed farming as the previous occupation of job applicants. Typically, a rural New York or Pennsylvania town was named as the previous community of residence.²⁸ Like tannery town migrants, rural farm folk learned of the firm from friends or kinfolk who had made their way to Johnson City and Endicott.

We had folks from our home town [near Carbondale, Pennsylvania] come up there, and when they'd come back for an old home day or something like that you'd get to visiting with them and it sounded good, so when I finished up the job at home, that's the first place I went,

Johnson City. The fellow that came with me, he got his job, we both got jobs, and I got my job over in the South End Factory cutting samples, a pattern cutter, and he went back. But I came at the right time of the year when they washed the streets and everything was so clean and the parks were wide open and everything. I said this is the place for me, I'm going to stay here.²⁹

A considerable number of native-born workers came from mining communities. As with many Slavs and Italians who left the mines, they, too, were frustrated by the frequent mine shutdowns, the brutal conditions of work, the hermetic existence, and the limited opportunities available in such towns, and they sought a better life at Endicott Johnson. Hundreds of company job applications listed mine shutdowns or strikes as "reason for leaving last place" of employment. Many more simply noted "dissatisfied."³⁰

Migrations from farming communities, mining, and one-industry towns followed a pattern similar to immigrant chain migrations. Often, the male head of the family would come and take a job in one of the tanneries or factories, finding a room in a local hotel or else boarding with a local family. After establishing himself in this way and deciding that the community was to his liking, he would send for his family.³¹ Once settled, friends and more distant kin from the former home town might be drawn to the area and to jobs in Endicott Johnson. There was security and comfort in following fellow townspeople to a new community.³²

The kinship ties that formed important links in both the transatlantic and domestic chains that brought workers to Endicott Johnson were exploited to the fullest degree by both the corporation and the workers. From the company's point of view, such ties helped recruit workers during periods of labor shortage. Generally, Endicott Johnson managers did not have to engage in active recruitment of workers. Encouraging employees to write relatives abroad or elsewhere in the United States sufficed. Occasionally, however, particularly during World War I, the firm needed additional mechanisms to augment its labor force. Company employees were then sent down to New York City, or other cities with substantial immigrant populations, to recruit new workers actively.³³

From the workers' point of view, family employment preferences shown by shop supervisors and employment officers gave them a "vested interest in employment opportunities" for relatives.³⁴ Typically, in the early decades of the century, a worker obtained a job through a family member or a close friend. One worker recalled how a "long-away" relative helped him get a job blacking sole edges: "He took me to his foreman, you know, and they give me a job in the next department there, right away."³⁵ Parents found it especially easy to secure positions for their children. A mother employed in the corporation diner was able to find employment there for most of her children.³⁶ Mothers, fathers, cousins, aunts, and uncles provided convenient employment

conduits for both close and distant kin. As one Italian worker summed up: "That's how they did it in those days, they helped each other out. If you had a cousin working, you'd get a job."³⁷

Although depressions and recessions drastically constricted the power of individuals to find jobs for relatives, such periods of limited employment opportunities also *increased* the importance of having family connections. Kinship became the primary vehicle available for obtaining a job in such times. Workers who succeeded in securing employment at Endicott Johnson during the worst years of the Depression generally had fathers, wives, husbands, or other relatives already working in the firm.³⁸ A worker without such connections found it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain employment with the company:

I wasn't able to get a job. . . . E.J. had a policy, if your parents worked there, children got first preference as far as getting hired. I remember one time, I was about seventeen years old, it was during the Depression, they were taking applications for work. I remember getting up about two or three o'clock in the morning just to get in line to be able to file an application for work. This was about 1935, 36. It was in the middle of winter. I was there until about ten o'clock in the morning, from two. Just to be able to walk in and put in an application. And that was the end of it; I never heard anything more from them.³⁹

Among the thousands of European immigrants, rural transplants, and small-town migrants who were drawn to Endicott Johnson were many women. Since the 1890s women had figured prominently in the firm's labor force. Following the national trend both their numbers and relative representation had risen dramatically in the 1880s and 1890s. In the former decade they had constituted between 5 and 15 percent of the company's work force. By 1900 there were 400 women employed by the firm, representing about 22 percent of the company's workers. Although some of this rise in female employment was due to displacement of male workers and to the expansion of the sexual division of labor in the factories, a far more important factor was the rising demand for stitching room operatives to match gains in productivity made by other departments—gains fostered by the introduction of new machinery.⁴⁰

Between 1900 and 1920 the proportion of women working for the firm experienced minor growth, but their absolute numbers rose considerably. In mid-December 1919, there were 3,962 female employees, approximately 27 percent of the firm's 14,498 workers.⁴¹ A more dramatic increase occurred in the 1920s. Responding to the growing market in seasonal, light-wear, and stylish shoes, Endicott Johnson opened new factories that specialized in such lines. Since women workers were generally employed in the manufacture of lighter-grade footwear, the number of women in the firm's labor force naturally rose. Thus, in the 1920s, with the overall work force fluctuating between

14,500 and 15,500, the relative proportion of female employees increased. By 1927 women made up 35 percent of the labor force.⁴²

The vast majority of women shoeworkers worked as stitchers in the stitching rooms. But they also skived and marked in the cutting rooms; they packed and laced shoes in the shipping rooms; they graded sole leather in the sole leather cutting rooms. They were perforators and stampers, cementers and trimmers, lining makers, treers, ironers, repairers, inspectors, and "cripple" (damaged shoe) chasers. Except in some of the better jobs, like skiving, perforating, and fancy stitching, their wages were far lower than men's wages. In 1926, for example, when the average weekly wage at Endicott Johnson was about twenty-five dollars, most women were making between sixteen and twenty dollars.⁴³

Women sought employment at Endicott Johnson for a variety of reasons. To young women or girls growing up in rural New York and Pennsylvania, a job in the shoe firm might be viewed as a vehicle for liberation from the constraints of parental authority or the hermetic world of rural farm life. Their desire to become "city girls" or "working girls" was often quite strong:

I wanted to get away from home! How many times I cried to my mother, I said I wanted to leave, I wanted to leave. She'd be washing clothes by hand . . . and I would be nagging her I wanted to go to work, and she'd take a wet towel and slap me around the face. . . . She didn't even want to listen to me—"you're staying here, you're not going to work." But then one time my father come, and . . . I told him that I wanted to go to work. So when he went back to Endicott, he took me.⁴⁴

Local girls, just out of high school or nearing the legal working age of sixteen, naturally looked to "E.J.s," the community's largest employer, for a job. They sought employment to contribute to the family's income, to save money for secretarial, teaching, or nursing school, and to find romance. Many had begun to work for the firm during summer vacations or had taken part-time jobs in the corporation's diners.⁴⁵ Younger girls often lied about their ages to obtain full-time employment with the company. As employment officers were not overly vigilant in such matters, they often got away with their deceptions, although not without paying a price: "I wasn't sixteen when I started to work at E.J.s; they didn't ask for my certificate, and I didn't have it. Every man come along towards me, I thought oh, he's gonna ask me for my certificate, he's coming to take me back to school, but he didn't. After I passed November 14th, well, they're not gonna take me now."⁴⁶

Most of the women who made their way into the Endicott Johnson factories were native born. A 1926 survey of working women in the Triple Cities (Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott), undertaken by the New York State Department of Labor, disclosed that 81 percent of local female shoeworkers—most of whom were employed by Endicott Johnson—were born in the United

States. Of the remaining 19 percent, 12 percent were Slavs. Only 1 percent of the surveyed women shoeworkers came from Italy. The relatively low number of Italian women working in local shoe factories reflected cultural values that limited their involvement in work outside the home.⁴⁷

In the mid-1920s about half of Endicott Johnson's women workers were married.⁴⁸ For many married women employment at Endicott Johnson meant being able to take advantage of the firm's welfare services. As one woman recalled: "I was determined to get to E.J.s, no matter how, because I could get benefits, and my family. I thought well, if I don't make high wages, so what? I'll get the benefits, and I'll be better off."⁴⁹ Such thoughts probably motivated many wives of local farmers, as well as married city women whose husbands worked outside the shoe firm, to seek work at Endicott Johnson.⁵⁰

There was always some ambivalence in management's attitude toward employing married women. In 1923 George F. Johnson wrote to a clergyman that "too many of our families, in order to make a little more money, send their wives into the factories. I don't approve of this except in cases of extreme necessity. The place of the housewife, it seems to me, is in the home."⁵¹ Indeed, in some ways the firm made things difficult for married women. It was inflexible in part-time hiring, claiming that such a policy was "not practical."⁵² Foremen and superintendents did, however, occasionally permit married women to engage in evening and home work, which allowed them to care for infants and young children while adding to the family economy.⁵³ Although George F. Johnson had personally donated money to a Binghamton day-care center, as corporation president he was never willing to provide day-care services to his employees.⁵⁴ Yet for many women the extensive welfare benefits that the firm offered partially made up for the lack of child-care facilities. Most married women simply left children with older brothers or sisters, with grandparents, or with other kin. The widespread kinship ties in the community fostered such informal solutions.

My mother, she took care of my two nephews and a niece when my two sisters went to work—not at the same time. . . . She [my sister] would bring her children—her first one—here, and he would stay here all week and he'd go home just weekends. But they'd come everyday to see him after work. And we could hardly wait for Sunday noon. . . . We could hardly wait for him to come back. There were eleven of us, and we made room for him too. Then she had a girl. . . . It was the same way with her when she was little.⁵⁵

Women who were not able to take advantage of kin to care for their children were forced to seek out less desirable arrangements, often paying neighbors to care for their infants.

Although Johnson was initially cool to the idea of married women being "sent" into the factories, he soon changed his opinion when faced with public controversy over the firm's high percentage of working wives. In 1927 and

1928, after a New York State Department of Labor report on women in Binghamton industries had made note of this fact and the results of the study had been released and widely publicized in the national and trade press, George F. Johnson felt compelled to defend the firm's policy with respect to employment of married women.⁵⁶ He wrote to *American Shoemaking*: "Women seek employment in our factories, because of the good wages they earn, and the easy work and pleasant factory conditions. If women continue work after marriage, it is because they want the money they earn; and who questions their perfect right?"⁵⁷ To his workers Johnson put his case even more forcefully, communicating sentiments diametrically opposed to those he had expressed in 1923. He wrote in the "Endicott Johnson Workers Daily Page" that

for my part, I admire a young man and woman who start out in life, both working together to get a start in the world. Such a plan is more apt to lead to independence, than the plan which contemplates that there shall be only one wage earner in the family. In these days of conveniences, light housekeeping, short hours of work, and much easier and better methods, a young woman who is willing to help her young husband, looks better to me than those who feel that because they are married they ought *not to do any more work*, or try to earn any money to help out.⁵⁸

Not all workers agreed with Johnson. For many a male shoemaker, a nonworking wife was a sign that he had "made it," that he could provide for his family—in short, that he was truly "head" of his household. Some went out of their way to prevent their wives from obtaining jobs in the firm. One foreman, for example, when faced with a wife who adamantly insisted on returning to work in the factory, called up the employment office and told them to destroy her application, which apparently they did obligingly. Furthermore, many married male shoemakers strongly believed that their children's proper upbringing required the constant supervision of their wives.⁵⁹

The large number of married women in the Endicott Johnson work force was also a source of contention between women employees, particularly during periods of slack work. One such period, in the summer of 1928, precipitated the following letter from a worker, published in the "Endicott Johnson Workers Daily Page":

Why is it that the work is taken from the girl, who has no home and has to keep up and the widows who have children to feed and educate? But it is given to those who have husbands and homes, and the men have to have their pleasure, such as fishing and hunting trips, when they are in season. Lest we forget, there is the lovely golf links for pastime if wifie will consent to buying the clubs for hubbie.⁶⁰

When the Depression arrived in full force, the question of working mothers and wives became even more controversial and finally exploded into a public debate, aired in the "Workers Daily Page." It was begun by an anonymous "E.J. Worker":

If they [married women] were relieved of their duties, there would be steady employment for others. I am not unmindful of the fact that machines have changed much of our manner of working; one machine in many cases doing the work which three or four men formerly did. But what about the woman who works so that she may enjoy luxury? This is not considering the social side of the question—the matter of divorce, children roaming the streets, locked out of their homes while their mother is engaged in gainful occupation. It is no wonder that our youth are responsible for so much crime today. The lack of adequate home life has caused much of the crime among our young people.

But I was only going to consider this problem from an economic standpoint. If the wife and mother were not working, the head of the house would of necessity have more steady work, and better pay. On the other hand, it has been my observation after years in an E.J. factory, that the man who has a wife working does not do his best. Why should he?⁶¹

The letter touched upon almost every conceivable prejudice relating to married women working.⁶² It was, in a working-class community with a large number of employed mothers and wives, "not a popular subject," as the letter writer conceded in closing. It was also, predictably, soon followed by a slew of letters both critical and supportive. The first came from Al Very (actually Alice Very), an outspoken worker who was active in various relief committees in the firm and who came to be highly respected by management, particularly George F. Johnson. She argued forcefully that "the married woman worker is usually the fast, dependable, experienced worker, on whom the directors depend to 'produce their production.' They are older, steadier, have an aim in life—to own a home, to educate their children, to care for dependent relatives, perhaps a few luxuries also. Why not if you've gumption and ambition to earn them."

Why should we cling to the eighteenth century idea, that woman's place is in the home—dragging and nagging her husband for necessities and luxuries. On the small apartments of today the upkeep is small and light—the homekeeper in many cases (not all) has many idle hours on her hands.

How many shoe workers—men—do you know who are able to support their families in ease, comfort and a few luxuries—unassisted.

How many of the young unmarried help stay that way? To keep up to your law of unmarried the company would be continually employing "green labor" which is a mighty costly proposition. . . .

As to the married woman whose children are locked out and run the street—if she's that type of motherhood, they would run the street even if she were [not] employed. A lot of them do, don't they?

The right kind of an employed mother leaves her children in someone's care while she earns the where-with-all to provide them with clothes, schooling and spending money.

There is still another side to this married woman worker. She works hard on the machine all day, yet has to return home, do her housework, cook for the family, and somewhere in between get what little social diversion she can find time for.

The married woman's life isn't all luxuries.

As to the man's lack of ambition, when the woman works. Darned if I don't think you are right, in cases too numerous to be pleasant. But if he's that unambitious, no doubt life would be fully as hard for the married woman if she didn't work, with its lack of luxuries and necessities, for the many positions filled by married women—most men couldn't do, or would scorn to do—for fear of loss of dignity. . . .⁶³

Responses continued to stream into the "Workers Daily Page." Two employees wrote in to deny that married women worked for luxuries. They argued that single women did not have the responsibilities that married women had. Turning the original luxury argument on its head, they replied with an *ad feminam* by charging the original writer with being "selfish" and wanting "to have more money to dress and go to shows and parties."⁶⁴ Another woman wrote in to signal her agreement with Alice Very's views, that few men "could make a go without the wife's help somehow."⁶⁵ A nonworking wife disagreed:

In nine cases out of ten, it is not necessity that compels the married woman to work. It is the desire for luxuries and also the idea she can not stay in. Her sense of freedom and her own pay envelope. Ask any woman that has once worked to give it up and see what she says. Why I know of several instances where the man alone is working, drawing ten and twelve dollars each week all Summer and trying to support a family of six and eight, while scores of families of two or three have fifty and sixty dollars at their disposal each week. Does that seem fair? Why not make an inventory of the factories and investigate these things. Lay off these married women and give the single ones a chance. . . . It certainly does not appear to me to be lack of pride and gumption when a woman is willing to sacrifice luxuries to make a home happy and if more women felt that way, there would be less race suicide among American people today.⁶⁶

Generally, those who took a position against the employment of married women argued that "every woman's place is in the home, taking care of her family, and if she has none, taking care of her house work." A working wife violated their conception of a woman's proper sphere. "Another thing if there's a war or anything like that why don't they put some of these smart married women in it instead of the boys that they won't give work to now, huh?" was one woman's response to the whole issue.⁶⁷ George F. Johnson's public position, supporting and even encouraging the idea of working wives, caused some workers particular concern: "I see Geo. F. decides with Al [Alice

Very] and still he says have more babies. Have the babies, let them run the streets, and the mothers go to work. Well I tell you that hurts me for I think Geo. F. is one wonderful man.”⁶⁸

The debate did not let up. Into early November letters continued to pour into the “Workers Daily Page” editor’s office. Again and again the same points were emphasized; the same lines of division surfaced. And once more Alice Very contributed to the controversy:

I s’pose all you intensely “home loving” women could hold down a factory job—could force yourself to work on your nerve all day—turn out acceptable work—then go home, get a meal, straighten out your house, cook and mend—and when the season rolls around squeeze in time to do your house cleaning. Perhaps its easier to do without the “luxuries” for yourself, children and man and be “home-loving.” Easier to let the man bear the brunt of earning and bills—easier to get your work done in the daylight—to feel free to attend P.D. meetings, serving circles, bridge parties of an afternoon—to be out in the fresh air, in your own home away from supervision of bosses, striving to keep up production. The path to the “luxuries” for married women isn’t “soft” or “fun” or all “luxuries.”⁶⁹

A male critic quickly replied to Very with a long harangue on the proper place of women and the injury they do to men, themselves, and their infants in entering the industrial sphere:

Women are being “emancipated!” They are usurping the places and privileges of the male! Shall they also assume the responsibilities of man? Will they adopt the chivalrous, protective attitude towards their mates heretofore displayed by those same mates towards them?

If women completely eliminate man from the industrial field, which appears highly probable, will they, the women, be willing to provide for their mates, to put it bluntly, keep them? There is nothing in their present attitude to imply this. . . .

In their lust for what they consider the better things in life, many women of today not only do not hesitate to destroy the very best things with which life can endow them, but even risk their own lives. In their efforts to defeat nature’s supreme purpose, so that there may be no decrease in their pay checks, they abjure the life of their unborn babes.⁷⁰

This highly emotional and seemingly interminable debate was abruptly brought to a close by the editor, but not before George F. Johnson published a letter on the matter in which he summed up both his and the corporation’s position: “It is a pity that all can not find work who desire it, either married or single. That is the great pity of it all. Any person who is willing to work ought to be able to find work. But inasmuch as they can not, it certainly is most unfair to consider discharging a woman just because she is ‘married.’ It would be just as unfair to discharge a woman because she was *not married*.”⁷¹

And so the public debate died, just as suddenly as it had come to life. No doubt, in the community and in the factories, workers continued to voice their opinions on the subject. There is little evidence that many changed their minds. Married women continued to work for the firm, and the firm continued to employ them.⁷² They took their maternity leaves or dropped out of the work force for a few years to have and raise their babies and then returned to work when their children were old enough to be left on their own or with other family members.⁷³

II

These, then, were Endicott Johnson's workers—married and single, men and women, immigrants and native born. They came from a variety of backgrounds and brought with them equally varied expectations. What united them was that they had all become "E.J. Workers." But this was a superficial unity indeed. In the factories, first and foremost, workers identified themselves as "stitchers," "cutters," "skivers," "lasters," "cripple chasers," "edge trimmers," "welt beaters," or any number of other job titles that placed them in the chain of production that constituted the twentieth-century shoe factory—a chain that, at Endicott Johnson, began in the tanneries and ended in the shipping rooms. Their work identities were derived from the functions they performed in the highly specialized and segmented world of the factories and tanneries. Although they shared the title of "E.J. Worker," their work experiences varied considerably.

For tannery employees the experience of work generally took place in wide, open workrooms filled with curing, drying, soaking, or hanging hides and leather. In these workrooms the manufacture of shoes began, for it was here that hides from South America and the American Midwest were received and processed into leather. Calf skins, sheep skins, steer hides, elk skins, and numerous less common varieties of animal hides were stacked, re-cured, and stored under controlled temperature conditions in the Hidehouse. After storage, and as needed, the hides were sent to the beamhouses of the various tanneries, where they were run through fleshing machines that removed remnants of animal flesh clinging to the hide. Next, they went to the "wash wheels," where they were loaded into huge rotating drums that washed and purged the hides of the residual curing agent, salt. The washing of the hides prepared them for immersion in lime vats, where the hides were soaked for a week or so to soften the hair. The skins were then removed from the vats, washed again, and put through "unhairing" machines. Hand beamers finished off the process of removing the hair. Once more, the hides were washed and then sent off to the tanyard to be transformed into leather.

The tanyard housed dozens of ground-floor pools containing various concentrations of tanning agents. In these pools the cleaned hides were immersed

for several weeks to absorb the tanning fluids that purged their pores of all animal oils and coagulated all of the albuminous material. Following this immersion the hides were bleached to remove the tanning agents and then prepared for the oiling process. They were wrung and fed into huge "oil wheels," which turned like washing machines, mixing and forcing the oil into the hides. Once tanned, the leather went up to the drying loft to hang for several weeks, although upper leather, which was usually dyed, went through "coloring wheels" before being sent to dry. After drying, the leather was moistened with water before going to the hand and machine setters, who removed the wrinkles from the skins, and, in the case of sole leather, to the rollers—the most skillful and best paid of the tannery workers—who smoothed and polished the leather by operating huge one-armed steel rollers. The finished leather was finally sorted and sent off to the various factories or to outside buyers.⁷⁴

Of the jobs in the company, tannery work was among the toughest. "Wet work" involved coming into contact with any number of caustic chemicals, heaving piles of heavy hides over wooden "horses," bending and scraping flesh and hair, often still infested with the remains of worms or other parasites:

That's where the bull work was, and I mean that was bull work. It was unbelievable how hard you had to work. . . . The stench was terrible . . . the conditions were terrible. You were wet most of the time. You were full of lime. It would splash on you. You would wear a blue denim shirt . . . you'd probably wear it, at most, a month. It would be all starched. You would wind up with sores and stuff like that from the burns.⁷⁵

"Dry work"—sorting, hanging, buffing, or rolling the dry leather—was a bit more pleasant but by no means easy. It often meant breathing large amounts of leather dust. Some jobs, like rolling, were extremely dangerous, and many a roller had suffered the unpleasant experience of watching and feeling a finger crushed beneath the shiny, metal roller that swung back and forth across the leather. Rolling required a great deal of skill, not necessarily to learn the task but to learn to do it well and safely. Expertise conferred considerable status.⁷⁶

Other jobs such as loading the coloring wheels or the wash wheels required little skill but a great deal of muscle. In fact, the handling of the hides, wet or dry, required great physical strength. Tannery work in general was considered a masculine occupation, and very few women were to be found in the tanneries. In mid-December 1919, of 1,835 workers employed in the company's tanneries, only 70 were women. More than twenty years later, their numbers had hardly increased.⁷⁷ Female tannery workers generally worked in the Calfskin, Sheepskin, or Upper Leather tanneries, where hides were smaller, thinner, and much lighter than sole leather hides. Furthermore, even in these

tanneries women were assigned to relatively light work, although it should be emphasized that *no* work in the tannery was light. They might be found trimming hides or unloading the dryers. They were conspicuously absent from the beamhouses, Hidehouse, and from wet work in general.⁷⁸ In being channeled into the "less arduous" positions in the tanneries, women were excluded from the higher-paying jobs. It was thus not surprising to find that they were the lowest paid of the tannery workers. Even when they were able to get on a "man's" job, they had to assert their right to a "man's" wage. "You gonna pay my day like the man today," one Slovak woman tanner demanded of her foreman after being allowed temporarily to perform heavier, normally "male," work.⁷⁹

Most female tanners were either Italian or Slavic.⁸⁰ Few native Anglo-Saxon women sought tannery work. It was, after all, not "respectable" employment. Yet this did not prevent them from viewing women tanners with awe. From the perspective of all women factory workers, the female tanners were a special group indeed. That they had invaded a male domain made them stand out. "There was some women in the tanneries," one former factory stitcher recollected in a reverential tone. "There was some females that done men's jobs."⁸¹ Male tannery workers also seemed to share in this awe. "They were strong as horses," a male tanner recalled.⁸²

It was no wonder that women tanners were viewed with such marvel. They worked alongside men known for their strength, stamina, and machismo. "They were bigger, stronger men down there. It was heavier work, and some of them liked to fight," recalled one former shoemaker.⁸³ Another worker asserted: "You had to be a man to work up in the tanneries. Some of those Polish fellows up there . . . them guys would work hard all day long. . . . The average worker in the shoe factory couldn't take it. They weren't that much of a man."⁸⁴

The organization of work in the tanneries differed radically from that of the shoe factories, where most workers labored individually and were paid by the piece. In the tanneries workers often functioned in teams on particular operations. Many were paid by the hour, particularly in the beamhouse. Those who were paid by production, however, generally knew in advance how many sides or hides they would complete on a given day. Production quotas established by the superintendents in consultation with the sales department and factory managers generally set the pace of work in the tanneries. Unlike in the factories, where individual productivity was open-ended, in the tanneries there were limits. These were set not only by market demands, which determined how much leather would be needed for sale to other firms and how much would be required for the corporation's own footwear, but also by the very process of tanning, where manufacturing procedures required several weeks to complete. When the requirements of the factories and of outside buyers were high, the pace of work in the tannery hastened; production quotas

rose, and workers labored through their full eight-hour shifts. But when quotas were low, as they often were in the late 1920s and 1930s, extended periods of short-time occurred, allowing workers to leave their jobs early and to take up outside employment.⁸⁵

The nature of production and teamwork had important social implications. Generally speaking, tannery employees demonstrated a greater cooperative spirit than that found in most of the factory workrooms, where piecework and competition for “good jobs” sometimes divided workers. A retired tannery crane operator who had worked for decades in the Sole Leather Tannery recalled the sense of fellowship he found at work:

In the tanneries you're more like a family. You work around that way for years and the same people would do different things. If a fellow'd get behind or something, you'd jump in and help him. . . . It's dog-eat-dog in the shoe factories. What I mean . . . if this guy gets behind maybe he'll do this guy's work, but he isn't gonna do it to help him. He's gonna do it for what he makes out of it. Where in the tanneries, they don't expect to get anything for helping the fellow out.⁸⁶

Other tanners recalled a very similar sense of collectivity. A Calfskin tanner remembered that spirit in this way:

In the tannery it used to be production . . . we used to get so many pieces of leather apiece to do. Some guys were a little slower than the others. Well, we finished first. The guy maybe had twenty-five, thirty pieces left. He should have worked another hour extra. Well, we jump over. I take three pieces, you take three pieces, he takes three pieces, and we all finish the same time. . . . The next day it might happen to me. Maybe I got a little behind, I don't feel too good, or something, or I come in a little late. . . . The guys—we used to help each other like that. We used to go hunting together, fishing together. We used to socialize together. . . .⁸⁷

The physical layout of the tanneries, vast open spaces with work areas both visible and easily accessible to one another, made for a work geography that fostered cooperation. With production quotas allowing workers to pace themselves as they wished, as long as they finished the quota by the end of their shifts, it was not uncommon to find men casually socializing or perhaps even gambling in some corner of the tannery, away from the watchful eyes of the foreman. Some took advantage of their “free time” opportunities to learn new jobs:

When I was running this jitney, I used to stop and talk with guys, and once in a while I would help them out with their machine, whatever it was they were doing. So I got pretty well acquainted with what they call feeding the color machine. That's where you put color on the hides when they were all processed and ready to color. So I used to talk with this one

fellow a lot, and then he used to let me, when he would go to the toilet, he'd say, "Stick a couple of 'em in through the machine." So I done that off and on for a while. Time passed on, and one day my boss come to me, and he says, "How'd you like a job on there, feeding the color machine?"⁸⁸

Occasionally, it is true, arguments or fights might break out between tanners or between the members of a team. Perhaps one was going too fast, or too slow. Here ethnic prejudices might surface, generally in name-calling. Although such altercations could degenerate into fisticuffs, more often than not they constituted opportunities to blow off steam—to relieve tensions, not to exacerbate them. Ethnic animosities between Pennsylvania-born Protestants, who constituted the bulk of the native tanners, and Italians and Slavs infrequently caused work disruptions by the late 1920s and 1930s. Job and skill divisions were no longer as well defined along ethnic lines as they had been earlier in the century, and while the various ethnic groups may not have mixed much outside of work, in their daily work lives they learned, at least, to live and let live, and often to cooperate.

Like the tanneries, the Rubber Mill and Rubber Reclaim plants of the corporation, in Johnson City, also fostered a cooperative work culture. A male domain, hard and dirty work, teamwork units: all functioned to create a unique community of workers. At the Reclaim Plant, salvaged automobile tires and other waste rubber products were processed and prepared for mixing with crude rubber. Huge machines that pulverized, devulcanized, masticated, and partially refined the scrap rubber required stamina and muscle to feed and operate. In the Rubber Mill, or the Paracord as it was otherwise known, the process of manufacturing the rubber was completed; and finished sheets were made into heels, soles, and rubberized cloth.⁸⁹ Here, heat presses, molding machines, and rollers required equal stamina. The sole and heel pressrooms were two of the more unpleasant areas of work. In these rooms the men operated in teams of two, pacing themselves to the presses, pulling out trays of hot molds, pushing cool ones in. "The temperature in the summertime was almost unbearable. A lot of these men came down with pneumonia."⁹⁰ It was not surprising to find that millwork, at least until World War II, was considered "no job for a woman."⁹¹

This male world of hot and taxing labor produced a fellowship among the workers. It was a place "where everybody used to have a nickname . . . like Singer, Wormy, Popeye, Wimpy. The language was pretty colorful, too." Employees who worked in the Paracord established a reputation very similar to that of the tannery workers.

The boys in the old Paracord were always thought of as the rough and ready boys of EJ. They were a tight-knit group, but they were a rough-tough group, too. It used to be a practice in the old days that one guy

would ring everybody in and out. . . . If somebody was in the habit of getting to work at 6:45, he'd grab all the cards for his department and ring everybody in. Some of these guys would come in at all hours, and occasionally they never showed up. If somebody was going to work overtime, half of the department worked overtime because one guy rang everybody's card out when he left, whether they put in overtime or not. . . .⁹²

Although the environment was unpleasant, the work in the Paracord did pay well. Best paying were the sole cutting jobs, where workers operated four-foot beam machines, much like sole leather cutting machines, which cut out the soles from sheets of rubber. The worker would place a tall steel die over rubber sheets while operating a foot lever that dropped a heavy block against the die to cut out the pattern. Like the sole leather cutter in the factory, the rubber sole cutter might lose a finger or two in the course of his career from flipped-over dies. Machine changes in later years alleviated such hazards, but through the 1920s and 1930s the loss of a finger was an ever-present danger, as well as a badge of honor.⁹³

In stark opposition to the male-dominated worlds of the tanneries, the Reclaim Plant, and the Paracord were the female domains of the factories—the stitching (or “fitting”) rooms. Located adjacent to the cutting rooms, usually on the upper floors of the factories, here was where the uppers of the shoe were stitched together in preparation for assembling and lasting. Usually very large and crowded, with rows upon rows of sewing machines, they were awash with the sounds of rising and falling needles.

The stitching room of a factory contained anywhere between 100 and 400 employees, almost all of them women. Male mechanics might weave their way here and there, on their way to repair a sewing machine. An occasional male might stand in the corner, operating an eyeletting machine, or on a vamping machine, which stitched the vamp around the uppers of the shoe in preparation for the Goodyear stitchers. But, in general, the stitching room was a female preserve, often ruled by “foreladies,” *always* under a male superintendent.⁹⁴

While the tanneries and the Paracord exemplified a cooperative spirit and a spirit of camaraderie, the stitching rooms were characterized by a very different atmosphere. Here, hundreds of women, from different cultures, speaking different languages, came together and competed. Work competition and petty squabbles would produce a far more segmented and individualized work culture than in the tanneries and rubber divisions. Work in the stitching rooms, as one stitcher recalled, was anything but conducive to a collective identity:

They put a time study on and then they'd check it out and set up a figure. Some of them would pay better than others, time study or not, and you got those pieces. . . . All you had to do was walk on the floor and grab

your case. You'd go along the line. There might be a dozen or more cases on the floor. When you got your work done, they were on these long boxes . . . and when you got your case done and put it on the floor again, you'd go looking over the line until you found a good case you wanted to work on. You could pick anything there and you always left the poor ones on the floor so you could get a good one. That's the way the women worked. We used to call them "grabbers." . . . There was alot of rivalry between people on the same job, and you'd kinda get mad at somebody if you'd thought they had done you wrong in getting the case that you should have had yourself. There was always somebody on the job that you didn't think was very fair.⁹⁵

Faced with the possibility of being stuck with only "poor work," stitchers kept a watchful eye out for the "good cases": "I was the last machine over, but I had a fine position because I could keep my eye out like that and find the good cases of work because you didn't always get a good case, so I'd go out and get a good case of work and bring it in."⁹⁶ Conscientious supervisors sometimes developed more equitable systems for distributing the work, but even there accusations of favoritism and arguments over work were not entirely avoided.⁹⁷

Work competition was by no means a problem isolated to the stitching rooms and to women. It was a condition endemic in shoe factories in general. As early as 1902 the *Union Boot and Shoe Worker*, the monthly publication of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, commented on the problem of "grabbing" in the shoe factory:

One of the things which tends to make factory life unpleasant and unprofitable is the opportunities which hoggish workmen often have of taking more than their share of the work and picking out the best of it. Life is always unpleasant in environments where the cheekier and brassier a person is the more he gets, and very many shoe factories furnish this sort of environment. . . . These hogs are to be found in almost every factory only waiting for a loophole in the factory system to exercise their talents for "skinning."⁹⁸

One male employee recalled how workers in the Boys and Youths Factory in Johnson City used to crawl through the windows in order to start work early.⁹⁹ Even in some cutting rooms, where the spirit of cooperation and camaraderie was relatively high, instances of work competition and "leather theft" occurred.¹⁰⁰ One cutter, Albert Tinney, immortalized the problems of work competition and favoritism in a poem, the "Cutters' Chorus":

Oh, the die boy is always chasing dies,
 For you and not for me.
 He's always springing some surprise,
 On you and not on me.

The die boy I can never find.
 I think he's gone to see
 If he can find a lot of dies,
 For you and not for me.

They always pick the best machine
 For you and not for me.
 If there is anything serene,
 It goes to you, not me.
 They fix us some old junk to run,
 And mark it with a "T."
 It only makes a lot of fun,
 For you and not for me.¹⁰¹

Yet if work competition was present throughout the shoe factory, it reached its apex in the stitching rooms. Rare was an interviewed stitcher who did not mention the problem of "grabbing."¹⁰² Workers did not operate in teams or in groups in the stitching rooms but as individuals. Furthermore, they were paid by piecework, a wage system that fostered individual rather than collective work behaviors. As one stitcher put it: "You'd try to grab the best tags to get the best shoes. That's all over. You'd find that no matter where you'd go. That's piecework. On timework you'd get paid whether you get the best or the worst."¹⁰³

Ethnic divisions further intensified work tensions between the stitchers. "The Russian workers in the factories were usually fast," one employee recalled. "Boy, I'll tell you I had more arguments with the Russian girls than with any other kind . . . 'cause they were really workers, and they would get in there and maybe they'd get five or six cases to your one."¹⁰⁴ Another worker recited a similar story:

It was all piecework, and they [the "foreign element"] would go in the morning at six o'clock and work right straight through. . . . Even after the eight-hour day [after 1916], some of them would go in even if they had to crawl through the window and turn the power on and start working. . . . They were brought up to work and work hard. They were a little bit grabby and very difficult at times to work with—of course, it wasn't all the foreign element either, really, but mostly that. . . . They'd hide work. Your work came by twelve or twenty-four pair lots, and if they could get a chance to hide some so that they'd have a little work when you were standing around waiting . . . [they would.]¹⁰⁵

Periodic bouts of short time worsened job competition, as did the absence of a strong work culture. Relatively high labor turnover rates among women, due to marriage, maternity leaves, and seasonal layoffs precipitated by the volatility of high-style women's footwear (where women were highly concentrated), decreased women's commitment to their jobs. Furthermore, the

lower-skilled, lower-paid component manufacturing tasks reserved for women hardly fostered much job pride or sense of skill. Those women who were able to obtain the choice "female" jobs often reflected a self-pride that was generally lacking in their less-skilled sisters. Fancy stitchers; top stitchers, skivers, and vampers took a greater interest in their work than other women laborers. As one top stitcher boasted: "Top stitching, what I did, is probably one of the best jobs [in the stitching room]. . . . It takes, to be a good stitcher, it takes a year."¹⁰⁶ Generally, however, women did not define their identities by their work, which, for them, constituted either a transitional state before marriage or a strategy for family survival and betterment.

The highly competitive atmosphere of the stitching rooms did not, however, preclude all possibility of cooperation and positive social interactions. Under certain circumstances stitchers were able to transcend their differences and the individuality fostered by the system of work and payment dictated by the firm. If their work lives were characterized by competition, it was also true that "grabbers" were looked down upon. Work meant more than competition. While the women workers lived in separate neighborhoods (the "Americans" in the south side, the Italians and Slavs in the north side), attended separate churches, and shopped in different markets, their work experience created a common bond. They conversed, sometimes in broken English; they planned birthday parties, wedding and baby showers, and other social events; they played together on athletic teams. They shared their dreams, pains, joys, and frustrations. It was in work that they all came together, and it was this common bond, marred though it was by competition and ethnic tensions, that sometimes yielded a collective rather than an individual strategy for self-betterment.

Adjacent to the stitching room of a factory was the upper leather cutting department. There, dozens of workers were responsible for cutting the upper components of the shoes—the vamps and quarters—from long sheets of leather. The cutters, always males, were the elite of the shoe factories: "The workers, upper leather cutters, were among the highest paid people in the company. You could work as many hours as you wanted. Any hours that you wanted. . . . That was back when it was a trade that you could go anywhere and get a job if you were a cutter."¹⁰⁷ Upper leather cutters might make as much as forty or forty-five dollars a week in the 1920s and early 1930s, double the average factory wage. Their status, as the factory elite, was reflected in the pride they had in their work:

It requires a certain type of individual. Now, you take your lasting room where your shoe is lasted—a good laster has gotta be a skilled man. It takes time. It takes probably a year to make a good laster. But it takes two years to make a good cutter. And it costs the company, at that time, it cost the company \$2,000 to make a cutter, because you had to know how to place your dies so as to utilize up every bit of that leather you can because leather was expensive.¹⁰⁸

In general, cutters exhibited a very strong sense of collective identity and an equally strong work culture anchored in the traditions of their craft. They came to work in white shirts and ties, setting themselves apart from the other shoeworkers, who came in plain work clothes. Leather cutting had been the last segment of shoemaking to be mechanized, and mechanization had a relatively minor impact on the skill requirement of the craft. When the United Shoe Machinery Company first introduced the automatic cutting (or "clicking") machine—a device that forced a block on an armature down against cutting dies, thus piercing the hide and cutting out upper leather patterns—the *Boot and Shoe Workers' Union* journal noted that "all of the skill required in cutting shoes by hand will be required in operating this machine."¹⁰⁹ Indeed, since about 1908 when the machine was first introduced until well into the 1950s, the device changed little, and the skill required to cut leather remained relatively high. Only with improvements in tanning and the introduction of synthetic leathers did cutting skills begin to erode.

Lasting, like cutting, had always been a prestigious occupation (and a male one), for it was the laster who first gave shape to the shoe, wrapping the uppers around a wooden last, avoiding wrinkles, tacking them in.¹¹⁰ But since the final decade of the nineteenth century, mechanical inventions of various sorts had undermined many of the skill requirements of the job and had divided lasting, once done entirely by a single worker, into various tasks—pullover, side lasting, bed lasting, and a host of additional minor operations. Yet side lasting and bed lasting still remained relatively skilled jobs and paid fairly well. Workers still needed to have manual skills and a good understanding of the complex machinery involved. It took six months to learn the more complicated job of bed lasting, somewhat shorter to learn side lasting. But it took a year to make good money on either. The length of time needed to learn such jobs discouraged many workers from entering the occupation.¹¹¹ Those who did enter it took great pride in their work and often defended their domain quite stubbornly against the encroachments of management. Lasters had always been among the more militant groups in the shoe factories.

Edge trimming, too, required a great deal of manual dexterity to master. It also paid quite well and figured very high in the factory occupational hierarchy. The job involved trimming the edge of the sole to a finished and smooth shape by placing the shoe edge against high-speed rotary cutters and moving it evenly against the cutters. It was a risky operation. Many workers lost fingers or parts of fingers in the process.¹¹² Several dozen men worked on edge trimming in the bottoming department of a factory. Like lasters and cutters, their common job pride was high and made for a relatively strong work culture. And, like lasting and cutting, edge trimming was a male occupation.

The outsole stitchers—the Goodyear operators and McKay stitchers—were also part of the aristocracy of the factory. They were relatively few in number, working in groups of a dozen or so. Their job was to stitch the sole to the

uppers. Located in the bottoming room of the factories, where the edge trimmers were, the outsole stitchers maintained a solidarity that was characteristic of the factory aristocracy. They were, along with the cutters, lasters, and edge trimmers, among the highest paid occupational groups in the factory—a status that reflected their intimate knowledge of the complex machinery they manipulated.

The Goodyear and McKay operators, all men, rarely competed for work but developed a spirit of cooperation and fellowship partially derived from their shared craft pride and skill. Furthermore, since they were a relatively small group of workers, they came to know each other fairly well and thus were able to transcend the individualism that piecework fostered: "That's one thing. We used to work together. If I had a machine breakin' down or anything, my buddy used to work with me. So he'd get up, he'd work on my machine, maybe a half-an-hour, and he'd fix it up for me. We'd work buddy-buddy style. It worked out very good that way."¹³

The Endicott Johnson Corporation also maintained its own mechanical divisions: foundry, die shop, carpentry shops, and powerhouses. Workers employed in these departments were not shoeworkers and performed functions that were not unique to shoe factories or tanneries. The carpenters, painters, die shop workers, and mechanics employed by the firm were skilled workers who were generally paid by the hour. Like the aristocrats of the factories, they constituted distinct units, maintaining a collective identity separate from the shoeworkers—one that had important implications when the unions began to make serious attempts to organize the firm in the late 1930s.

Between the male elites of the factories—the cutters, lasters, edge trimmers, outsole stitchers, and mechanical workers—and the female stitchers, labored hundreds of other operatives throughout the plants. Floor workers, tackers, sorters, rounders, lining workers, carton makers, and packers all helped to produce and ship the final product. Few developed the sort of coherent work identities that were part of the groups described.

III

Work at Endicott Johnson, then, was anything but a collective experience. It was varied, segmented, and complex. Not only did employees labor in different physical plants, but within these structures they were divided into separate departments, each with its own unique physical and social characteristics. But they had several things in common. They *were*, after all, "E.J. Workers." They shared in the benefits of the firm's welfare system. They all felt the power of Johnson's personality. And they all, finally, confronted the "distinctions of authority" that constituted the factory caste system. As Johnson wrote, in 1920: "Inside the factories we have our distinctions of authority; outside the factories we are all fellow citizens together."¹⁴

It was "inside the factories" that Endicott Johnson managers hoped to reap what welfare capitalism sowed. But it was also inside the factories that the welfare ethic was often violated. As one stitcher mused: "I know everybody thinks that EJ was such a wonderful place to work. Well, it was, but in the factory, you didn't get anything for nothing."¹⁵ If it was true that the workers "didn't get anything for nothing" in the factories, it was equally true that neither did management. The experience of work so strained the welfare ethos, which was predicated on notions of industrial partnership, collectivity, and family, that it could not help but be transformed, ignored, violated, and contradicted. Although welfarism seemed to succeed in lowering labor turnover and limiting worker militancy, in the everyday work lives of the employees, it failed in important ways. Ultimately, it was the experience of work that mediated workers' response to welfare capitalism, and it was the experience of work that limited its success.

NOTES

1. Unfortunately, nineteenth-century nativity and ethnicity data on the firm's employees are unavailable. Inferences from census data on shoeworkers residing in the county, however, suggest the conclusions above. In 1892, of the 424 enumerated shoeworkers in Binghamton and the adjacent township of Union (where the Lestershire Factory stood), 80 were foreign-born, the majority coming from Ireland (26), Germany (18), Canada (14), and England (8). New York State, Department of Labor, *Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor*, vol. 1, 1893 (Albany, 1894), 502-3, 644-45.
2. George F. Johnson to the editor of the *Union News Dispatch*, June 30, 1919, box 5, George F. Johnson Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.
3. By 1944, although the actual number of foreign-born had remained stable, the proportion of foreign-born workers had declined to about 27 percent of the company's entire force. The nationalities represented are shown in the table on p. 89.
4. Rose C. Feld, "An Industrial Democrat Points the Way," *New York Times Magazine*, June 3, 1934, 7. See also William Patrick Burns, "A Study of Personnel Policies, Employee Opinion and Labor Turnover (1930-1946) at the Endicott Johnson Corporation" (Master's thesis, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1947), 20.
5. Imrich Mazar, ed., *Dejiny binghamtonských slovákov za dobu štyridsat' rokov, 1879-1919* [Forty years of the history of Binghamton Slovaks, 1879-1919] (Binghamton, N.Y., 1919), 7-8, 60-61. For an example of one such migration, see S——, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud and Laura Kirkland, May 15, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 1 and passim. A good account of Italian and Slovak village chain migrations may be found in Josef J. Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), chaps. 2 and 3.

Country of Birth	Number	Percent of Total Labor Force	Percent of Total Foreign-Born
Czechoslovakia	1,584	10%	37%
Italy	1,113	7%	26%
Poland	492	3%	11%
Austria	378	2%	9%
Lithuania	200	1%	5%
Russia	130	1%	3%
England	82	1%	2%
Turkey	46	1%	1%
Germany	43	1%	1%
Ireland	38	1%	1%
Canada	32	1%	1%
Hungary	25	1%	1%
Other	166	1%	4%
Total foreign-born	4,329	27%	
Total labor force (est.)	16,000		

SOURCE: "Endicott Johnson Foreign Born Workers," Aug. 16, 1944, box 34, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y. Nineteen-forty-four was a volatile year that witnessed a rapid reduction of the firm's labor force, due mainly to military conscriptions. Sixteen thousand is an approximation of the size of the labor force in early 1944—the company's "normal" contingent. The number of workers declined to a low of about 14,000 that year.

6. A fine source on the European village origins of local immigrants is the extensive oral interview collection currently being compiled and transcribed by the Broome County Immigration History Project, based in the Roberson Center for the Arts and Sciences in Binghamton, N.Y.
7. M——, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Feb. 24, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 1, 2, 5; *Binghamton Press*, Apr. 11, 1914; A——, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Apr. 23, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 9.
8. Mary Sasina Decker, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, July 11, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society); Mary Seversky, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 22, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Dominick Cinotti, interview by Nettie Politylo, June 8, 1978, transcript (Broome County Oral History Project); John Walikis, "An Analysis of Slovak Women in the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Corporation in the Southern Tier" (Research paper, S.U.N.Y. at Binghamton, 1974), 5 and passim; North Endicott Senior Center group, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Feb. 8, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project); Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y. Employment files contained information on length of time in the United States and in Endicott, on previous employment, on the location of wives and children ("in old country"), and on reasons for quitting ("return to old country").

9. In 1920 about 4 percent of Johnson City's enumerated residents were born outside of the United States (351 out of 8,587), compared with Endicott's 22 percent (2,073 out of 9,500) and Binghamton's 15 percent (10,368 out of 66,800). U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1922), 690, 697-98.
10. William Inglis, *George F. Johnson and His Industrial Democracy* (New York, 1935), 88-89; *Endicott Bulletin*, Aug. 19, 1915; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1932), 298-99, 302-3. Restrictive clauses on deeds excluding aliens were also in force in Endicott and were partially responsible for separating the Italian and Slav neighborhoods from the "American" neighborhoods. In the mid-1920s many of these clauses became void, and a few Italian families moved "across the tracks." Jeffrey Pines, "Endicott, New York: Industry, Immigrants & Paternalism" (Honors thesis, Dept. of History, S.U.N.Y. at Binghamton, 1982), 21-23; *Endicott Bulletin*, July 18, 1924.
11. Sylvan P. Battista, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, July 13, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Theresa Schuttak and Fran Eckert, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, Apr. 30, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); North Endicott Senior Center group, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Mar. 8, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 2-3; *Binghamton Press*, Jan. 20, Jan. 25, 1910.
12. *Binghamton Press*, Jan. 27, 1910.
13. *Ibid.*, Jan. 6, Jan. 10, 1910.
14. Sam Salvatore emphasized Johnson's influence along these lines. Sam Salvatore, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 7, 1981, tape recording (personal possession). See also Luciano J. Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian-Americans* (New York, 1971), 57-58, 141. Most of the workers I interviewed who grew up in Endicott in the 1920s and 1930s acknowledged that ethnic tensions existed, but they also asserted that these were very minor in scale. They recall the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s in amusing rather than threatening terms. This was true of both native and ethnic workers. On nativism and the Klan in the community in the 1920s, see Jay Rubin, "The Ku Klux Klan in Binghamton, New York, 1923-1928," *Bulletin of the Broome County Historical Society* 20 (Winter 1973): 1-59.
15. This was fairly typical of the boot and shoe and leather industries. Data on wage differentials by nativity can be found in U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports*, vol. 12, pt. 9, *Immigrants in Industries, Boot and Shoe Manufacturing* (Washington, D.C., 1911), 43-46; and in *idem*, *Reports*, vol. 12, pt. 8, *Immigrants in Industries, Leather Manufacturing* (Washington, D.C., 1911), 334-38.
16. *Binghamton Press*, Jan. 28, 1910.
17. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
18. *Lestershire-Endicott Record*, Mar. 20, Mar. 27, 1915.
19. *Ibid.*, July 15, 1915.
20. "Superintendents and Foremen," Oct. 30, 1941, box 33, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers. About three dozen supervisors (foremen or forewomen)

had eastern or southern European surnames out of 408 listed. About a dozen of these were in the tanneries (out of 75 tannery supervisory personnel). The southern or eastern European-named supervisors in the factories were generally in charge of stitching, packing, and shipping rooms. A partial examination of employment files of supervisory personnel from the 1915-30 period further supports the above observations. A more comprehensive treatment of both employment and promotional discrimination in the corporation must await a thorough quantitative analysis of existing employment records. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records. See also Battista, interview, session 1.

21. C——, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Feb. 15, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 10; John Robble and Anis Robble, interview by Gerald Zahavi, June 28, 1983, tape recording (personal possession); Salvatore, interview.
22. Local 42, Boot and Shoe Workers Union Pledge Cards, Boot and Shoe Workers' Union Records (hereafter BSWU Records), State Historical Society of Wisconsin. More than 2,000 pledge cards, from the 1938-40 union campaign at Endicott Johnson, contained the names and occupations of workers. It is clear from surname and job entries that southern and eastern European ethnics had managed to make major encroachments into many of the most skillful jobs.
23. Paul Coletti [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 13, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
24. *Endicott Bulletin*, Aug. 3, 1916.
25. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records. Hundreds of employee records listed Pennsylvania tannery towns or tanneries as places of former employment.
26. William Haight, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, May 27, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
27. James W. Lupole, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 15, 1981, tape recording (personal possession). Segments of Lupole's account and chronology were confirmed by his father's employment record. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records. For other versions of tannery town migrations, see Paul R. Knickerbocker, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, June 10, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Bernice O'Connor and Roger T. O'Connor, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, Nov. 7, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Paul R. Eckelberger, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, June 26, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
28. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
29. H——, interview by David Nielson, June 23, 1973, transcript, 18. A similar tale of rural migration may be found in Palmer Perkins, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, Apr. 30, 1982, tape recording (personal possession). See also Clarence Dirlam, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Dec. 12, 1979, tape recording (personal possession); Amy King, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Nov. 30, 1979, tape recording (personal possession); Kenneth

- Cowan and Inez Cowan, interview by Gerald Zahavi, June 2, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Henry Banner and Emma Banner [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, June 2, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
30. North Endicott Senior Center group, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Feb. 1, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 1, 5; Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
 31. Knickerbocker, interview, session 1. Numerous variations of the above might occur. Sometimes, sons or daughters might make the initial migration and bring up parents. Stanley L. Moody, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, June 1, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Helen Bruno, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, June 13, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
 32. The appearances of the same home towns on job applications (under "Last Place of Employment") further demonstrate this. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
 33. Battista, interview, session 1; Knickerbocker, interview, session 1; Robble, interview.
 34. Burns, "A Study of Personnel Policies," 53.
 35. A—, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Apr. 23, 1982, 9. Friendship was the equivalent of kinship with respect to obtaining jobs in the firm. One rather detailed employment file, containing a long account of the work history of an Austrian worker, noted that the worker twice obtained employment in the firm by virtue of the go-between services of a friend. Employment Record of L. K., Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
 36. Margaret McGregor, interview by Diane Baker, Sept. 3, 1981, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society), 1; Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
 37. North Endicott Senior Center group, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Feb. 1, 1982, 5. See also First Ward Senior Center group, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Mar. 2, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Broome County Immigration History Project), 2; Seversky, interview; Owen J. Ryall, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, Apr. 30, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Earl I. Birdsall, interview by Gerald Zahavi, May 5, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Knickerbocker, interview, session 1.
 38. See, for example, Ralph V. Russell, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, May 27, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Battista, interview, session 1.
 39. North Endicott Senior Center group, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Mar. 8, 1982, 6–7.
 40. Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 93–94. Through the 1890s the proportion of female to male operatives in the firm had been even greater. New York State, *Report of the Factory Inspector*, 1st through 15th annual reports (Albany, 1887–1901). Nationally, between 1880 and 1900 the number of enumerated female shoeworkers (sixteen years and older) rose from 25,122 to 47,186, an increase of about 59 percent. In that same period the number of male shoeworkers (sixteen years and

- older) grew from 82,547 to 91,215, an increase of only about 11 percent. Thus, between 1880 and 1900 the proportion of women in the industry labor force had risen from 23 percent to 33 percent. The relatively low proportion of women workers at Endicott Johnson (Lestershire Manufacturing Company) in 1900, compared with the national average, was probably due to the firm's specialization in heavy footwear, a sector of the industry that traditionally employed more males. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*, vol. 9, *Manufactures* (Washington, D.C., 1902), 741; Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry: A Study in American Economic History* (New York, 1910), 177-83; Frederick J. Allen, *The Shoe Industry* (New York, 1922), 262; Edgar M. Hoover, Jr., *Location Theory and the Shoe and Leather Industries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), 212-13.
41. "Census of Manufactures, 1919," General Schedule, Form 100, box 21, George F. Johnson Papers. This is a copy of the actual schedule filed with the Bureau of the Census.
 42. "To the Workers" notice, Jan. 13, 1944, box 10, ser. 3, Frank A. Johnson Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N. Y.; George F. Johnson to *American Shoemaking*, Dec. 20, 1927, box 9, George F. Johnson Papers.
 43. The median wage of women shoeworkers surveyed by the New York State Department of Labor in 1926—most of whom worked for Endicott Johnson—was \$18.70. New York State, Department of Labor, *Women in Binghamton Industries* (Albany, 1928), 37-38; "To the Workers" notice, Jan. 13, 1944, box 10, ser. 3, Frank A. Johnson Papers.
 44. Katie Wasylsyn Chopiak, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, session 1, Aug. 6, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society), 4.
 45. Agnes Lyon Guy, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Dec. 12, 1979, tape recording (personal possession); Mattie Drake Pitcher, interview by Gloria Comstock, summer 1981, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society), 1; Bruno, interview; Margaret McGregor, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Aug. 13, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society), 1. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
 46. Chopiak, interview, session 1, p. 2. Boys also lied about their ages. See, for example, Thomas K. Chubbuck, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, June 29, 1981, tape recording (personal possession). Age discrepancies on employment applications of workers who left and came back to the firm also demonstrate widespread age deceptions. Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
 47. New York State, Department of Labor, *Women in Binghamton Industries*, 37. A discussion of cultural factors that limited the working careers of Italian and other immigrant women may be found in Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 1982), 123-28. See also Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, 1977), chap. 7; Louise C. Odencrantz, *Italian Women in Industry: A Study of Conditions in New York City* (New York, 1919);

- Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York, 1977), 71-77.
48. New York State, Department of Labor, *Women in Binghamton Industries*, 11, 37. George F. Johnson to *American Shoemaking*, Dec. 20, 1927, box 9, George F. Johnson Papers.
 49. Frances Filip and Adaline Filip Zevan, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, Aug. 10, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society), 2.
 50. Single women who had special medical needs also viewed the corporation as a valuable resource. One unmarried woman with a disability, for example, recalled: "So, the one thing at that time with Endicott Johnson was their medical and their doctors. You'd be taken care of. Of course, in my mind I knew that I would probably always have to have care. So I applied for a position." She was hired in spite of her medical condition. B——, interview by David Nielson, Dec. 31, 1973, transcript, 168.
 51. George F. Johnson to Rev. C. John Trois, Nov. 17, 1923, box 7, George F. Johnson Papers.
 52. George F. Johnson to Mrs. N. B. Snyder, Nov. 23, 1923, box 7, George F. Johnson Papers.
 53. Seversky, interview.
 54. George F. Johnson to Mrs. Lillian Thomas, Apr. 16, 1923, box 7, George F. Johnson Papers. He wrote Thomas that "we have never yet found it convenient or opportune to do anything of this kind, and we are not now ready." In the following year he replied to another request for day-care provisions by directing the head of the firm's Medical and Relief Department to look into the possibility of providing such services to working mothers. George F. Johnson to Zoela T. Clouse, Dec. 5, 1924, box 7, George F. Johnson Papers. Ultimately, however, Johnson decided against it. He wrote another inquiring correspondent who raised the suggestion of a day nursery: "I am not ready at this time to consider it seriously. There are many other things which we have encouraged; but this has never made any strong appeal to us." George F. Johnson to Dr. Mary A. Snowe, Oct. 24, 1925, box 8, George F. Johnson Papers.
 55. Seversky, interview.
 56. A preliminary summary was published in "Married Women in Industry," *Industrial Bulletin* [New York State Department of Labor] 7 (Nov. 1927): 45. A rather innocent piece (except to Johnson) based on the *Industrial Bulletin* article appeared in *American Shoemaking* 99 (Dec. 14, 1927): 30-31. See also *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 1928.
 57. George F. Johnson to *American Shoemaking*, Dec. 20, 1927, box 9, George F. Johnson Papers.
 58. "Endicott Johnson Workers Daily Page," *Binghamton Sun*, June 10, 1928. Emphasis in original.
 59. Thomas K. Chubbuck, interview by Gerald Zahavi, session 3, June 28, 1983, tape recording (personal possession); Elmer Knowles and Audrey Knowles, interview by Gerald Zahavi, May 10, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Jack Hobbie, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Nov. 11, 1979, tape recording (personal possession).

60. "Endicott Johnson Workers Daily Page," *Binghamton Sun*, June 2, 1928.
61. *Ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1930.
62. For more general discussions of the issues raised by this letter and the debate that followed it, see Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 250–60 and passim; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900–1930* (New York, 1979), chap. 6; Winifred D. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).
63. "Endicott Johnson Workers Daily Page," *Binghamton Sun*, Oct. 24, 1930.
64. *Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1930.
65. *Ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1930.
66. *Ibid.*, Oct. 29, 1930.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1930.
69. *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1930. Very went on to denounce those women who criticized married women working as "women who evidently haven't made the most of their husband's earnings, who are careless about having more babies than they can afford to care for. . . ."
70. *Ibid.*, Nov. 5, 1930.
71. *Ibid.*, Nov. 6, 1930. Emphasis in original. Johnson's attitude was not atypical. Few manufacturing concerns placed formal restrictions on the hiring of married women during the Depression, although informal discrimination may well have been widespread. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values*, 100.
72. Some employment officers, however, either responding to or reflecting the prejudices expressed in the above debate, were less willing to hire women with young infants during the Depression. See Katie Wasylsyn Chopiak, interview by Nancy Grey Osterud, session 4, Sept. 10, 1982, summary and partial transcription (Nanticoke Valley Historical Society), 25–26.
73. Many women, while working in their early marriage years, permanently dropped out of the labor force once they became pregnant. Seversky, interview; Bruno, interview; King, interview; Schuttak and Eckert, interview; Banner [pseud.], interview; Hobbie, interview; Endicott Office Files, Endicott Johnson Employee Records.
74. On tanning processes, see the following: Endicott Johnson Corporation, photographs by Russell C. Aikens, *Partners All: A Pictorial Narrative of an Industrial Democracy* (New York, 1938); Allen, *The Shoe Industry*, chap. 5; Paul R. Knickerbocker, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 3, July 22, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Battista, interview, session 1.
75. Battista, interview, session 1.
76. It only required about two months to learn rolling, although far longer to learn to do it with speed and safety. Knickerbocker, interview, session 3.
77. "Census of Manufactures, 1919," General Schedule, Form 100, box 21, George F. Johnson Papers. A company labor relations survey appearing in 1943 noted that no women were employed in the Sole Leather Tannery, but that "several" were employed in the other tanneries. Although no accurate statistics on women employees in the tanneries in the 1940s have been found, oral interviews and company files suggest that their numbers had not appreciably

- increased over the 1919 figure. Endicott Johnson Corporation, "Labor Relations Survey," p. 38, Jan. 22, 1943, box 4, ser. 2, George W. Johnson Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N. Y.; Knickerbocker, interview, session 3; Battista, interview, session 1. See also "What the Union Has Done for Its Members" [1947], Local 285 files, International Fur and Leather Workers Union, box 61, Joint Board of Fur, Leather and Machine Workers Records (hereafter Joint Board Records), Labor-Management Documentation Center, M. P. Catherwood Library, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.
78. Knickerbocker, interviews, sessions 1 and 3; Sylvan P. Battista, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 2, Nov. 12, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Salvatore, interview; O'Connor, interview.
 79. North Endicott Senior Center group, interview, Feb. 1, 1982, 7. When the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union signed its first contract with the company in 1944, it established a minimum wage of sixty-three cents an hour, which resulted in increases for several dozen workers throughout the tanneries. In the Upper Leather Tannery a large percentage of those who were affected by this minimum were women. See "What the Union Has Done for Its Members," Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Records.
 80. This is clear from both oral interviews and lists of tannery workers located in the Joint Board Records and National War Labor Board, Region 2 Case Files. Salvatore, interview; Knickerbocker, interview, session 3; "What the Union Has Done for Its Members," Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Records; Endicott Leather Workers Union, Local 285 membership list, July 25, 1945, box 15, National War Labor Board, Region 2 Case Files, Labor-Management Documentation Center, M. P. Catherwood Library, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.
 81. O'Connor, interview.
 82. *Ibid.*
 83. C——, interview by David Nielson, July 26, 1973, transcript, 87.
 84. Kenneth E. Compton, interview by Gerald Zahavi, May 5, 1982, tape recording (personal possession).
 85. Many tanners had second jobs. Knickerbocker, interview, session 1; Battista, interview, session 2; Salvatore, interview; Haight, interview.
 86. Haight, interview.
 87. Salvatore, interview.
 88. O'Connor, interview.
 89. A fine description, with photographs, of the manufacturing processes taking place in these plants may be found in Endicott Johnson Corporation, *Partners All*, 76–83, 94–95.
 90. T——, interview by David Nielson, June 1, 1973, transcript, 192. See also Eckelberger, interview, for descriptions of pressroom work.
 91. Banner [pseud.], interview. Women temporarily obtained jobs in the mill during World War II.
 92. T——, interview by David Nielson, June 1, 1973, 194–95.

93. Cowan, interview; Banner [pseud.], interview; T——, interview by David Nielson, June 1, 1973, 190.
94. On the sexual division of labor in shoe factories, see Allen, *The Shoe Industry*, 155, 169, and passim; Seversky, interview.
95. H——, interview by David Nielson, June 23, 1973, 22. Another stitching room worker offered a similar observation: "In the factory there is good work and there is bad work. There is cheap work, and there is more expensive work. . . . You'd clip off a coupon for every dozen. Sometimes there would be clashes. Somebody would be really fast and get all the good work." O'Connor, interview.
96. D——, interview by David Nielson, July 19, 1973, transcript, 52.
97. O'Connor, interview; Seversky, interview; Margaret Azarin [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, Nov. 15, 1983, tape recording (personal possession). Such accusations were particularly rife in the Depression. Both the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union and the United Shoe Workers of America made much of them during their organizing drives in the late 1930s and early 1940s.
98. "'Grabbing' in the Shoe Factory," *Union Boot and Shoe Worker* 3 (Mar. 1902): 18.
99. Cowan, interview.
100. John Kovak [pseud.], interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, session 1, July 15, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Chubbuck, interview, session 1.
101. *E.-J. Workers' Review* 2 (Mar. 1920): 69.
102. Seversky, interview; King, interview; Schuttak and Eckert, interview; O'Connor, interview. Interviews by David Nielson also document the extensive work competition in the stitching rooms.
103. Schuttak and Eckert, interview. For a short discussion of the divisive impact of piece wages on women stitchers, see Osterud's essay in Ross McGuire and Nancy Grey Osterud, *Working Lives: Broome County, New York, 1800-1930, a Social History of People at Work in Our Region* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1980), 73-74.
104. O'Connor, interview.
105. King, interview.
106. Schuttak and Eckert, interview.
107. B——, interview by David Nielson, Aug. 14, 1973, transcript, 140, 156.
108. Chubbuck, interview, session 1. Chubbuck's estimate of the cost of training a good cutter appears to be a bit high. The Federated American Engineering Societies estimated the cost at about \$600. See Federated American Engineering Societies, Committee on Elimination of Waste in Industry, *Waste in Industry* (New York, 1921), 14; cited in Hoover, *Location Theory*, 209.
109. *Shoe Workers' Journal* 9 (May 1908): 9. The new machine increased output and alleviated the need to sharpen knives constantly.
110. Women lasters were employed in the rubber footwear divisions in the late 1920s and early 1930s. There, the work required less skill and physical strength.
111. Richard J. Murphy, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 7, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Ryall, interview.

112. Ryall, interview. Ryall had cut every one of his fingers many times over.
113. Compton, interview. Compton worked as a Goodyear stitcher in the Fair Play Factory in West Endicott from 1928 until the early 1960s.
114. George F. Johnson, "30 Years without a Strike," *System* 37 (Jan. 1920): 45.
115. R——, interview by David Nielson, July 10, 1974, transcript, 295.