Rough in the Bunch:

Appalachia's Rayon Girls
Fight for the Right to Strike

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I first learned about the rayon girls through an Appalachian History class. I chose this topic because it sparked my interest in relaying a narrative that transcends gender barriers and is both empowering and inspiring to anyone who feels like an underdog.

My research included reviewing oral history accounts of the Bemberg and Glanzstoff plant employees at the University of North Carolina’s Oral Histories of the South archive. At the McClung Collection Archives, I found articles on the strike from local and statewide newspapers. The Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University and the Tennessee State Library and Archives allowed me to view photographs and video footage of the strike. Through the Library of Congress Digital Archives I found period correct videos of the rayon-making process along with footage of suffrage rallies and labor meetings. At the East Tennessee Historical Society I found primary and secondary sources on the history of women’s rights in Tennessee.

I created my project in Final Cut Pro X using primary source photos and footage and a soundtrack of relevant music including a modern track that gave a succinct interpretation of the importance of the way the women dressed for the strike. I was able to create a narrative of modernity that this topic requires.

My project relates to the NHD theme by identifying the right of the Elizabethton female textile workers—rayon girls—to strike. This right is juxtaposed with the responsibility of the textile mill owners to provide a safe work environment and to pay a fair wage. The rayon girls proved their right to strike—to seek fair treatment, to request equal wages. The mill owners were required to accept the responsibility to create a safe work environment and to deliver a fair wage.

The first wave of strikers walked out of the spinning room on March 12, 1929. Initially these workers were not part of a union, but a group of women that desired better working conditions and higher wages. The women had been forced to produce more rayon through a process known as the “stretch out” without receiving additional compensation. To be taken seriously by the plant managers and not to appear impoverished, the women agreed to strike dressed in high heels and their “Sunday best” clothing. The strikers were met by opposition and denied their right to strike near the plant from the mill owners supported by the Carter County Court.

My research uncovered that the Elizabethton Textile Mill Strike of 1929 was the catalyst for a host of other female-led textile mill strikes across the southeast. These strikes improved the working conditions in textile mills and culminated in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. This Act became the cornerstone for all employer responsibility legislation in the United States, leading to the formation of a national minimum wage and a standard forty-four-hour workweek. The significant legacy of the rayon girls’ right to strike is still felt by every American laborer.
Primary Sources

Books


_This book helped me learn more about the rayon-making process and the way in which textile mills were run around the time period the Elizabethton strikes occurred._


_This book, a compilation of the issues of the magazine The American Federationist published by the American Federation of Labor in 1915, helped me to understand the importance of unions in labor disputes in the early twentieth century, and how unionism directly impacted the fight for workers' rights._


_This book helped me to learn about the importance of unionism and union leaders in the United States around the time of the Piedmont region strikes. Unions during this time period played a crucial role in the struggle for Southern laborers’ rights._

*This book helped me to understand the attitudes during the time of the Piedmont region strikes toward striking workers, both positive and negative. This book is one of the first to designate the region of the Southeast that contained many textile mills, including the ones in Elizabethton, as the “Piedmont” region. It detailed the consequences of the "stretch-out" and gave credence to the idea that the Elizabethton strike predicated all other strikes in the region.*

**Government Documents**

*Anna Weinstock Schnieder Papers 1921-1967. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library and Online Archive.*

*Viewing these papers from Cornell University's digital archive helped me to gain an understanding of the mediation tactics practiced by Anna Weinstock, who helped to bring an end to the Elizabethton strikes. Seen as a novelty by many because she was a woman, Weinstock was a shrewd negotiator and often understood the plight of the workers for whom she was mediating discussions.*

Loewe V. Lawlor, Legal Information Institute (February 3, 1908).

*Reading this primary source legal brief helped me to understand the court standing of the day. The Supreme Court ruled in this case concerning the application of antitrust laws to labor unions. The Court's decision outlawed secondary boycotts as violations of the Sherman Antitrust Act. This limited the activities of strikes as related to the transfer of goods manufactured across state lines. This ruling limited the rights of workers to strike. This helped me develop a further understanding of the rights of American workers in the early 1900s.*

*This register showed the mediators appointed by the federal government to discuss an end to the Elizabethton strike, including Anna Weinstock. This was useful in helping me understand the transitions of mediation that occurred along with their timeline of occurrence and how each mediator brought a unique perspective to the rayon girls’ struggle.*


*Reading this Act helped me to understand the nature of the responsibility plant owners had to their employees, and how these responsibilities were often neglected. The Department of Labor was created to oversee employers and to help them in the facilitation of their responsibilities. Although owners often disregarded their responsibilities in keeping their employees safe and providing them with a fair wage, the creation of a Department of Labor was an important step in the United States government’s recognition of workers’ rights.*


*This government document from the Senate committee investigation of the Elizabethton strikes reaffirmed suspicions of poor working conditions in the textile mills of the Piedmont region. These conditions eventually led the rayon girls to claim their right to strike.*
This primary source document allowed me to understand that the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 was the first measure passed by the U.S. Congress to prohibit trusts. Court rulings as related to this act stated that the act forbade any "restraint of commerce" across state lines, and courts ruled that union strikes and boycotts were covered by the law. This helped me understand the limitations of American workers to strike in certain situations.

This government document detailed the appalling treatment women in spinning rooms were forced to work under in textile mills. It noted that in southern states under the stretch-out, conditions were especially deplorable. This primary source provided additional reinforcement to oral interviews from mill workers about the dangerous factories they worked in.

This interview taught me about the blacklisting of several workers after their open participation in the strike. The interviewee was a striking rayon girl in 1929. She saw first-hand how the Bemberg and Glanzstoff plant managers blacklisted some of the women following the strike settlement.

*This interview, from a Southern social justice activist predominantly active in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, helped me to understand the nature of Southern industrialization, and why factories moved to the less-unionized South. This interview was interesting, as it noted that many Southern towns offered tax breaks and other incentives to corporations who moved factories into their town. This, combined with the ability to pay non-union Southern laborers less money, led to the migration of factories to the South.*


*This interview helped me to learn more about how the stretch-out affected workers in the mills. This interviewee spoke of how the stretch-out impacted her personally.*


*This interview with the local bodyguard of one of the kidnapped union leaders was significant in providing a local perspective on the strikes. Although Cole did not work in the plant, his sister did. He was involved in almost every element of the strike, and viewed firsthand nearly all of the clashes between strikers and corporation workers.*
This interview with a lawyer who was present at the Elizabethton strikes provided context as to how the citizens of Elizabethton felt about the strike. I noted that many of the wealthier citizens were divided about the nature of the rayon girls, but most of the lower/middle class people in the community appreciated the work that they were doing.

This interview helped me to understand the role of one of the first walk-outs, Christine Galliher, and the role she played in the Elizabethton strikes. Her insight and experience proved very useful as a device to further convey the narrative of the rayon girls in my documentary.

This interview helped me to learn how the stretch-out process affected everyday workers. It was also useful in explaining the difficulties blacklisted workers faced after the strike.

In this interview, I learned about the unfair pay scale for women in the textile mills of the Piedmont region. Eula McGill began work at the mill at age 14 and was only paid $2.50 per week. When the plant managers failed their responsibility to pay a fair wage, the rayon girls claimed their right to strike.

Archival Collections


This file helped me to understand how the German owned Bemberg factory (renamed American Bemberg during World War II) came to be. Germans were some of the first to manufacture rayon, but the climate and lack of abundant fresh water in Germany led German factory owners to move to the American South.
**Journal Articles**


*This journal article helped me to learn more about the Federal Employers’ Liability Act and the opinions about it at the time. This Act was one of the first to establish owner responsibility for workers’ rights. This gave me perspective as to why Bemberg and Glanzstoff plant managers did not feel compelled to secure a safe work environment for the rayon girls.*


*This article dealt with the strikes that were springing up after the Elizabethton, Tennessee strike of 1929. The rayon girls’ strike led to additional textile mill strike in the Gastonia, North Carolina in early 1930. This allowed me to see how these strikes led to chaos in the textile towns of the Piedmont region.*

**Newspaper and Magazine Articles**


*This newspaper article spoke of the arrest of striking workers. The adjoining photograph was of the remains of a union member's home that had been shattered in an explosion as he attended a union meeting. This article taught me the extreme lengths that both "sides" of the strike were taking as the strike lengthened.*

This ad placed in a newspaper by the Bemberg and Glanzstoff corporation related the stipulations Anna Weinstock facilitated as a mediator between the strikers and the corporation. It noted that the workers' grievances would be recognized. This helped me understand the depth of support the local newspapers gave Bemberg and Glanzstoff.

"Arrest 5 for Kidnapping Unionists." The Scranton Republican, April 5, 1929, sec. A.

This article documented the arrests of five Elizabethton, Tennessee business owners for the kidnaping of Alfred Hoffman of the United Textile Workers of America and Edward McGrady, Vice-President of the American Federation of Labor. This further validated the violent tendencies that the strike initiated in the region.

"Deadlock Grips Textile Strike: 500 Johnson City Workers Stage Strike." The Elizabethton Star, April 22, 1929.

This newspaper article from Elizabethton’s neighboring town of Johnson City, Tennessee helped me to understand how the rayon girls inspired strikes across the southeast. This supported that the Elizabethton strikers inspired other textile mill strikes.

*William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, is quoted as urging the Senate Manufactures Committee to approve the resolution authorizing a Senate investigation into the Elizabethton Textile Strike. Green contended the mill owners were "sowing seeds of Communism" and described their actions as one of national concern. Green also harshly criticized the governor of Tennessee for sending troops to Elizabethton.*


*This article quotes William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, as stating low wages and "onerous" working conditions as the cause for the Elizabethton strike. The article explains that Green was testifying before a Senate committee and was quoted as saying the mill owners were "sowing the seeds of communism." This helped me understand the deep level of concern national union leaders had for the rayon girls and their strike.*


*This article told of the calling in of the Tennessee National Guardsmen at plant owner Dr. Arthur Mothwurf's request. This action by Governor Henry Hollis Horton was followed by ensuing panic and violence as the strikers' numbers swelled.*
"Kidnapers Seize Two Labor Leaders." The Reading Times (Reading, PA), April 5, 1929, sec. A.

This article authored by an Associated Press writer, spoke to the urgency expressed by the United States Department of Labor in preventing the spread of textile strikes across the south. Department of Labor Conciliator, Charles Wood, was sent to the region to see what could be done to end the strike. This allowed me to view the commitment the Department of Labor had to ending the Elizabethton strike.


This magazine article talked about the strike in Elizabethton and how it was already beginning to affect workers in surrounding states. Although local newspapers did not report the violence and chaos that occurred during the Elizabethton strike, it is interesting to note that national newspapers and magazines took up the cause of the rayon girls fighting for their rights.


This summary of the year to date in significant national headlines is seen in photographs in this full-page article. These included images of the three labor leaders that were working with strikers in Elizabethton, Tennessee. This gives credence that this strike had national implications and was being followed in newspapers across the United States.
"No Agreement Yet to Settle Rayon Strike." The Bee-Danville (Danville, VA), March 15, 1929, Evening ed.

This article documents the addition of the Tennessee Federation of Workers to support striking Elizabethton textile workers. The support came after Dr. Arthur Mothwurf, President of Bemberg Corporation, declared the plant "would not reopen on a union basis." This information helped me understand that national union leaders saw the strike as a stand ground strike.

"Opponents Ready for Tennessee Textile Strike." Santa Cruz News, April 17, 1929, sec. A.

The article cites comments made by Dr. Arthur Mothwurf, Bemberg Plant President, that the plant had been turned over to the Tennessee National Guard. This move would later prove to launch the strike into violence.


This article corroborates evidence of the Bemberg and Glanzstoff plant managers initially claiming that the strikers were simply “a few unhappy workers” and that they were back at work at the plant. The growth of the strike and the escalation of violence between the strikers and the plants would eventually prove this information false. This further evidenced the bias of local media against the rayon girls and gave me greater insight into the challenges these ladies faced.


This article, published slightly before the rayon girls' strike in 1929, explained the still-new process of rayon making and how these textile fibers could revolutionize the world.
"STRIKE ENDS: PLANTS OPEN." *The Elizabethton Star*, March 22, 1929.

This headline alerted local newspaper readers that the strike had ended. Unfortunately, other primary source material contradicts that the strike had not ended at this point in time. According to oral interviews recorded by the University of North Carolina Archives of Appalachia, the Elizabethton Star was pressured by the American Bemberg and Glanzstoff corporation to keep quiet about the strikes. Additionally, this source provided a useful visual representation of the local news media's reaction to the strikes.


This article, from the perspective of the local news media, reported that the strike had ended. However, oral accounts and other primary source newspapers from across the nation asserted that it didn't end until May 1929. However, this newspaper was funded partly by the corporation and so was advised to keep quiet about the escalating violence between the strikers and the National Guardsmen called in by the corporation.


This article detailed the potential meeting of the strikers on the night it was written. Through oral accounts, I was able to discover that night that the meeting was to inform and warn workers about the Tennessee National Guardsmen that were arriving in the town to quiet the strike. This helped me understand that the local media was involved in the attacks on the rayon girl strikers by alerting all of their readership of potential union meetings.

This article provided evidence as to the escalating violence between the strikers and the corporation. In this article, the calling out of the Tennessee National Guard is detailed more fully. The author fully supports Bemberg and Glanzstoff in this article and applauds the arrival of the Tennessee National Guard as a means to end the strike.


The author of this article visited the Elizabethton area to investigate the factors behind the southern textile mill strike and how new labor was being recruited into the plant. This helped me understand that the eyes of the nation were truly on this small town and that the events of the strike had national implications.

"Textile Strikers Taken in Charge in Large Number Tennessee Town Tuesday." *The Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, TX), May 14, 1929, sec. 1.

This article gives details of the arrest of more than two hundred-fifty striking workers. Each person was charged with intimidation and were escorted to the Carter County Courthouse by the Tennessee National Guardsmen. The article states that the guns of the guardsmen were leveled at a number of strikers and bayonets were drawn. This article expounds on the potential for violence in the strike. It also documents the national attention the strike drew to the region.

*This article helped me to understand the textile strikes that occurred in the northern United States that led many factory owners to move to the American South. This image also served as a useful visual aid in my documentary.*

**Photographs, Video, and Audio**


*This video contained original footage from the strike and interviews with three of the bosses who ran the plants during the strike in 1929. It was interesting to see a perspective that differed from that of the rayon girls, and provided insight into what these bosses thought of the strikes at the time.*


*This song helped me to provide a uniquely East Tennessee viewpoint within my documentary.*


*This classic song served as a recognizable reminder to my audience of the location and context of the 1920s South within my documentary.*
This actual video footage of the Bemberg and Glanzstoff plants from the Tennessee State Library and Archives helped me to provide context for my audience as to the construction of the plants and added a useful visual component to my documentary.

These videos provided a valuable resource and insight into the activities of Elizabethton residents. It also helped me to see visually the magnitude of the strikes, the amount of Tennessee National Guardsmen, the aftermath of much of the violence in the town during the strike, and the negotiations between various labor leaders, mediators, and plant bosses. It also proved to be a useful visual device in displaying to my audience the lives of the rayon girls during the strike. Historians do not have a clear explanation as to why Bemberg and Glanzstoff hired individuals to record this footage.

This image helped me to understand the sheer number of National Guardsmen deployed to Elizabethton to quash the rayon workers' strike. Due to their arrival, violence erupted in Elizabethton, Tennessee, as workers became agitated at their government's refusal to hear their concerns and allow the rayon girls to exercise their right to strike.
Misc. Footage From the Library of Congress. 1925-1930. DVD.

This footage, including period-correct video of the rayon-making process, helped me to provide a visual component for my audience so as to help them understand how rayon factories were operated.


This image helped me to show my audience the actual United States Senate Manufacturing Committee in session. These meetings were called in the wake of the violence erupting in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

Suffrage Footage From Encyclopedia Britannica Digital Archive. 1919. DVD.

This video footage from various suffragette rallies helped me to visually demonstrate to my audience how suffrage rallies were carried out. These rallies often inspired women, like the rayon girls, to fight for their rights that had been long denied.
Secondary Sources

Books


This book helped me to understand the importance of the labor movement in the American South and how these values became incorporated into the national consciousness. An important facet of this book was its description of the South as the "bad job capital of America." This quote helped me to understand why so many industrial organizations migrated to the south, due to the combination of easy availability of natural resources and cheap and abundant labor, and the rarely unionized aspect of the south. This book asserts that many southerners viewed unions as a "bugaboo of yankeeism" due to propaganda from mill owners.


This book helped me to understand how local newspapers during labor disputes often did not cover the story, or looked for ways to tell it in the bosses’ favor. The reasons for this are several; first, many factory owners sponsored the local newspapers almost entirely; and second, many of the reporters had family members involved at the factory and didn’t want them to lose their jobs.

*This book contained a brief footnote about the Elizabethton strike, and provided additional historical context about Tennessee during the time period of the strike.*


*After reading this book, I gained a greater understanding of the impact of the Elizabethton strikes of 1929 on the surrounding area, often called the Piedmont region. I also learned how the region's available natural resources, particularly the wealth of nearby fresh water, affected the growth of factories in the region.*


*This encyclopedia helped me to understand the historical context behind labor struggles in the United States. I learned how earlier strikes in the North influenced the Elizabethton strikers and set the precedent for the responsibility of employers to protect their workers.*


*This book provided me with background information on the history of the state of Tennessee during the Elizabethton strikes.*

*This book gave credence to the notion that the Elizabethton strike sparked a wave of strikes across the southeast. In it is detailed a host of other strikes in states beginning in North Carolina and Georgia where strikers were inspired by the rayon girls.*


*This book helped me to understand more about working class culture in the south during the time period of the Elizabethton strike, and how this may have influenced the rayon girls. This book explains that female wage earners in the south were a novelty, but recent advancements in women’s rights prompted the rayon girls to assert their independence and right to strike.*


*This book addresses how the histories of Southern women are often pushed to the side of America's mainstream historical narrative. It also addresses the reasons why the rayon girls' story is not known because, within labor history, the histories of women are silenced. Further, within American history, the histories of Southern women are silenced. Finally, within Southern history, the histories of industrial laborers and labor revolutionaries are silenced.*

_This book helped me to learn more about the expansion of industrialism in the South. The author highlighted the advantages for plants to relocate from the Northern United States to the southern region._


_This book helped me to understand the often little-known stories of women who changed the face of the United States. It directly references how women were involved in the labor movement, and how they influenced this cause._


_This book helped me to understand how strikes were carried out in northern states, and the differences and similarities between this earlier strike in the North and the Elizabethton strike in the South._


_This book helped me to understand the role of women as documented in key elements in American history. This historical perspective gave me insight into how these roles affected female laborers._

This book dealt with the intertwining of politics and labor in the textile mill towns of the Piedmont where so many of these textile strikes, like the Elizabethton strike, occurred. The fabric of smaller towns like Elizabethton would be directly altered through the extension of industrial labor capitalism with the introduction of these mills.


This book provided more context as to the history of the New South Movement and how it affected Appalachian communities like Elizabethton, Tennessee.


This book helped me to understand how and why the textile industry in the United States migrated South. The reasons included: an abundance of natural resources, cheap and available labor, cheap land, and low property taxes imposed upon the factories.


This book, a compilation of the issues of the magazine *The American Federationist* published by the American Federation of Labor in 1915, helped me to understand the importance of unions in labor disputes in the early twentieth century, and how unionism directly impacted the fight for workers' rights.

*This book helped me to understand the nature of Progressivism in the South, and how this directly influenced Southern people like the rayon girls.*


*This book helped me to understand the interpersonal relationships among textile mill workers. The close friendships that women in these mills developed influenced textile mill strikes in the south.*


*This book spoke to the industrialization of Elizabethton as a direct result of the textile mills' growth in that region. This affected residents and the community as a whole, both now and then. This helped me understand why the arrival of Bemberg and Glanzstoff was applauded in the community.*


*This book helped me to understand how Progressivism in the South, while not quite as liberal as Northern progressives, helped to liberate in some way the laborers of the South.*

This book taught me more about strike songs that were popular for protesters during the Piedmont strikes of 1929-1934. The rayon girls may have used these songs. This gave me a greater understanding of what a typical day for a striking rayon girl may have sounded.


This book gave me historical context of one of the most well-known labor history events in the United States. It helped me to understand how labor disputes were often carried out in the North, and the cultural differences between workers in northern and southern plants.


Elizabethton is the county seat of Carter County, Tennessee. This book helped me to learn more about the history of Carter County including its early inhabitants, past agrarian lifestyle, and the arrival of Bemberg and Glanzstoff.


This book gives credence to the idea that the strike in Elizabethton was the catalyst to a host of other strikes across the Piedmont region. One of the most significant and violent of the strikes occurred in Gastonia, North Carolina. The study of these Gastonia strikes helped me to understand how other workers were inspired by the rayon girls' fight for their rights.

This book helped me to understand how the flames from the Elizabethton rayon girls’ strike spread into neighboring textile mills across the southeast. Gastonia, North Carolina, was home to the first striking mill populations that was directly inspired by the rayon girls acting upon their right to strike. These strikes manifested in different ways, but they all had one thing in common: They were inspired by the rayon girls.


This book helped me to learn how the Elizabethton strike of 1929 directly influenced a wave of strikes across the Southeast in what as known as the General Textile Strike of 1934. This strike had been building since the rayon girls' first strike at Elizabethton, as evidenced in the strikes that occurred soon after across the Piedmont region. Reading this helped me to understand what an impact the rayon girls had on the layout of the textile industry in the United States for years to come.


This book provided examples of inspiring American women in history, state by state. It was specifically helpful in educating me about the role of Tennessee's suffragettes and how they may have inspired the women of Elizabethton.

*This book helped me to understand more about the New South Movement and how it affected Appalachian communities like Elizabethton, Tennessee.*


*This fictionalized account of the Gastonia, North Carolina, strikes helped me to understand the variety of strikers on the picket lines during the Piedmont strikes. Although the main characters in this book are predominantly male, through this I learned what the mindset of many strikers may have been in Elizabethton.*


*This book helped me to understand the bias through which southern journalism hid the actions of mill owners during the textile strikes. This is particularly obvious during the Elizabethton strike. The Elizabethton Star, a local newspaper heavily funded by ad revenue from the Bemberg and Glanzstoff plants, refused to print negative editorials regarding the mill managers during the strike. The paper did, however, print various ads from the plants to the workers encouraging them to cease striking, and explaining the futility of the strike.*


*This book helped me to understand how the suffrage movement was carried out in the American south, and how the tactics of these southern suffragettes inspired working-class women to fight for their rights.*

This book helped me to understand the political economy of the "stretch-out." The stretch-out became the catalyst for the Elizabethton strike and eventually the wave of strikes immediately following. The stretch-out was a wave of high production, lower wages, and fewer laborers forced upon southern textile mill workers due to the rapid technological increase of machinery ability. The mill owners forced workers to produce so much that they were "stretched" both physically and mentally. This business practice led to an increase in workplace accidents and health issues among the workforce.


This book helped me to understand the importance of unions in southern labor, both historically and present-day. This author addresses the past history of the less-unionized south and how this lack of unionization has become the norm across the United States. This book also asserts the necessity of unions in the south, and that the fight for labor rights will be won and lost in the south, and acknowledges the importance historically of the rayon girls in this struggle.

Government Documents


This map helped me to understand where the Appalachian Mountains lie on a map of the United States, in order to properly visualize this unique region.

*This government document helped me to understand the ways in which the rayon-making process was altered in order to be safer for workers.*


*This government document taught me how the Fair Labor Standards Act positively impacted the rights of workers for years to come. This shows that the rayon girls right to strike changed the landscape of workers’ rights.*


*This article informed me about the current state of Appalachian industrialization and unionization. It helped me to learn how labor struggles of the past can influence future endeavors.*
This interview with a professor from Columbia University helped me to understand the militancy of female strikers in the United States. This allowed me to place the actions of the rayon girls in the Elizabethton strike in relation to other female rights actions.

This interview with Dr. Brooks, who has worked exclusively with women's labor history related to the rayon girls, greatly helped me to place the importance of the Elizabethton strike in the context of greater women's labor, and Southern history. A professor at Auburn University, Dr. Brooks was able to give credence as an expert in the field to the notion that the rayon girls started the labor revolution in the South.

This interview with the President of the Tennessee branch of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations helped me to understand the impact of the textile strikes in Tennessee, begun by the rayon girls, had on union activity and government legislation even today. President Moore helped me to understand the importance of labor unions in the South today, and how the female strikers in Elizabethton set a precedent for female involvement in the work of unions, especially in the South.

*This journal article, published through East Tennessee State University's Center for Appalachian Studies, helped me how the industrialization of the south more fully. This article details the labor struggles of coal miners, as well as factory workers, and includes interviews and oral histories that lend credence to the ways in which industrialization drastically changed the subsistence farming agrarian culture of Appalachia forever.*


*This journal article taught me about the global reaction to the Gastonia, North Carolina strike of late 1929 that was inspired by the Elizabethton rayon strike. The Gastonia strikes were viewed as violently communist by many media outlets; for some, this was inherently evil. Others noted the unique nature of the workers’ demands. The Gastonia strike is the most well-known of the Piedmont strikes, although works published about it typically give credit to the Elizabethton strikers for their direct influence.*


*This journal article addresses the current struggles farmers in Appalachia and across the American South face and the ongoing nature of these struggles since the fall of the Old South's plantation economy.*

This journal article helped me to understand the importance of the ways in which female protesters dressed throughout the 20th century. This was of particular importance to the story of the rayon girls; the Elizabethton protesters often wore outfits decorated with American flags. One reason for this was a display of patriotism that often won them support in the community, as America was fraught with nationalism after World War One. Secondly, the National Guardsmen patrolling Elizabethton during this turbulent period were required to stop and salute any American flag they saw. Thirdly, the rayon girls were protesting the German owners and operators of the plant. While each reason was valid, stopping the National Guardsmen was extremely beneficial because the guardsmen often harmed protesters by attacking them with rocks, the butts of their guns, or even tear gas. By engaging in protest fashion, the rayon girls were able to protect themselves in a nonviolent way.


This article taught me about how the textile strike in Elizabethton, Tennessee, directly influenced the textile strike in Gastonia, North Carolina. The strike at Gastonia gave rise to a new kind of literature in the early 1930s, that of the poor southern white. The rayon girls strike reverberated across the country. When Margaret Bowen walked out of the spinning room on March 12, 1929, she had no idea that this act could effect so much, including legislation and the very fabric of American cultural consciousness regarding poor southerners.

*This journal article showed me the importance of protest songs during the Piedmont strikes. These songs aired the grievances of workers and promoted solidarity within striking groups, especially between female strikers, who often wrote and performed the songs.*


*This article compares and contrasts the difference between the author’s study of the Lowell, Massachusetts mill strikes and historian Jacquelyn Hall’s study of the Elizabethton, Tennessee mill strikes. In both, the author claims, the women who typically came from farming backgrounds were able to renounce their mill work with the independence to return to the farm. However, in the case of the Elizabethton workers, their distinctly Appalachian heritage promoted a different view of the “modest, feminine” female gender, and so allowed for greater freedom to rebel against their employers.*


*This journal article first exposed me to the story of the rayon girls. I was inspired by the nature of these women to break traditional gender stereotypes by fighting for their rights.*

This journal article dealt with the ideals of small Southern communities largely influenced by textile mills like Elizabethton and how these ideals came to fruition in their strikes. Through this, I learned how the independence of Southerners, especially those in the Appalachian South, would lead to more strikes.


This article informed me as to how the rayon industry grew and why it settled in predominantly the Piedmont region. Rayon production was invented in Germany, but Europe did not have the fresh water supply nor the cheap and abundant labor source that the American South had.


This article showed me another perspective on the lasting effects of the rayon girls. In the article, the author states that the Elizabethton strikers “challenged” the New South movement. In other words, effectively striking down the unchecked industrial growth of the south. This growth, however, was brought on by the forsaken responsibilities of employing corporations failing to provide proper pay, decent working hours, and safe working conditions for their employees.

This source helped me to learn more about Ella May Wiggins, a representative of textile mill strikers through her folk songs. Hailing from the region, Wiggins was killed in one of the strikes that spiraled from the inspiration of the Elizabethton rayon strikes.

Lane, Yvette Florio. ""No Fertile Soil for Pathogens": Rayon, Advertising, and Biopolitics in Late Weimar Germany." *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 545-62.

This article was interesting, as it was a discussion of how class warfare and racism played into the placement of German rayon plants in Elizabethton. This article asserts that the early stages of Nazism and nationalism in Germany gave Aryan Germans a sense of superiority over Americans, who they considered "unhygienic" due to the mixing of races and cultures in America. This is why many German plant managers believed it not immoral to pay workers less for more work and to place them in dangerous working conditions.


This journal article helped me to understand the class structure of Appalachia. From this I was able to hypothesize the ways in which class impacted the rayon girls, their employers, and the surrounding players in the Elizabethton strikes.

This journal article helped me to learn more about the study of women's labor history throughout American history and scholarship. The article notes that southern women are particularly overlooked in this study, despite their militancy with regard to unionism and striking. I hope through my project to educate more people on an important event in southern women’s labor history, and labor history in general.


This journal article helped me to learn more about the Progressive movement in the United States, and how it influenced laborers' rights. Progressives worked with the goal to create safer working conditions and secure women's rights in order to improve women's standing in society through voting rights and better employment.

*This journal article helped me learn how media, especially newspapers, can control the cultural hegemony of Appalachian communities. Those who control the media control the people in many cases. By reading this, I was able to understand the cultural significance of the local Elizabethton newspapers reporting the strike to be over although residents could see visual evidence of the strike still going on; the corporation, through its control of the newspaper, wanted the strikers to believe they had no right to strike, and that they weren’t being seen.*


*This journal article taught me about the rough passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act, and how it has impacted workers since its inception in 1908.*


*This journal article gave credence to the idea that the Elizabethton strikes preceded all other strikes in the Piedmont region and directly inspired workers across the region to strike for their rights.*

This journal article examined the primary source footage of the strikers held at East Tennessee State University and the Tennessee State Library and Archives. It helped me gain a clearer perspective as to what the rayon girls wanted to achieve through public marches.


This article allowed me to understand how the New South grew by examining urban planning of various Appalachian communities, including several in East Tennessee.


This journal article taught me more about the complexities of textile strikes throughout United States history. I used this to deepen my understanding of the impact these strikes had on the overall economy.
**Newspaper and Magazine Articles**


*This small pamphlet helped me to learn basic information about the history of the Elizabethton strike and how it affected the greater region of East Tennessee with regard to both women’s and labor history.*


*This article, written by a law professor, outlines the importances of the right of the American worker to strike. This right was first protected by the National Labor Relations Act in 1938. This secondary source helped me understand how the rights of the American worker have evolved over time, but is ultimately rooted in the effects of the strikes of the twentieth century.*


*This report, published several years after the strike in Elizabethton, dealt directly with the improvement of working conditions due to the rayon girls' strike. This article also examines how the rayon-making process was altered in order to be safer for workers since the building of the plants.*
Pope, James Gray. "How American Workers Lost the Right to Strike, and Other Tales." 

*This secondary source, published in the Rutgers Law School Dispatch, outlines the origins of five statements of labor law made by the Supreme Court, each of which has had a devastating impact on the American labor movement. This helped me understand the impact each ruling has had on the rights of the American worker. This aided my project in developing a statement of rights that are afforded to the worker under the United States Constitution, legislation, and rulings.*

**Photographs and Video**

*Photo of Gary Moore, President.* Tennessee AFL-CIO Staff, Tennessee American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, Nashville, TN.

*This photo served as a useful visual representation of Gary Moore, President of the Tennessee AFL-CIO, within my documentary.*


*This video helped me to understand the role of an injunction in labor disputes.*

This song provided a bluegrass twist on a modern classic, and served as a useful transformative transition in my documentary.


I made the decision to include modern music in much of my documentary because I believe the struggle for workers’ rights and women’s rights are still very much alive in modern times. This jazzy song helped me to portray the Progressive era appropriately.

Holland, Deborah. I Am a Union Woman (Join the CIO). 1985. MP3.

This song provided the credits of my project with a rebellious and yet haunting song, imitating the ways in which the strains of the rayon girls’ strike are still felt today.


This acoustic version of a popular modern song helped me to retain modernity within my documentary while still retaining a rustic context.

This song served as a sort of Easter egg to myself within my documentary. A dramatic take on one of my favorite songs, this fit perfectly within the nail-biting sequence of my documentary.


*I used this song as a quirky reminder of the often weaponized womanhood—characterized as “disorderly” or “tough”—that many rayon girls had to undertake in order to be taken seriously during the Elizabethton strike.*


*This song brought the aura of intensity and drama that occurred during the Elizabethton strikes within my documentary.*


*This song is a bubbly package, wrapping up the difficulties of labor strikes for the rayon girls and playing while their impact is demonstrated.*


*This song, while modern, brought a rustic, Appalachian, and rebellious feel to my documentary.*

This website helped me to discover some basic information about the strike and how it affected the larger community of Carter County, in which Elizabethton is located. It provides a unique local perspective on the strike.


This website helped me to learn some basic information about Elizabethton, Tennessee. It includes historic information and current statistics on population growth and industry.


This article helped me to learn more about Ella May Wiggins, a balladeer who was shot and killed during a textile mill strike in Gastonia, North Carolina. This article gives credence to the idea that the Elizabethton strikes were the catalyst for other violent textile mill strikes across what is known as the Piedmont region. This story is jarring, as it speaks to the level of southern women's involvement in these strikes. Her last words are particularly indicative of the southern tradition and serve as incontrovertible evidence of the resilience of these women and the violence of these strikes: "Lord 'a mercy, they done and shot me!"

This website article from the United States Department of Labor helped me to understand the ways in which Progressivism sought to improve working conditions for laborers across the United States.


This article helped me to understand the grand scheme of the events that occurred during the Elizabethton strike.


This article helped me to learn more about the role of women in the Progressive Movement.