

The decline in employment in the postwar period was accompanied by a relatively high rate of unemployment among textile workers, particularly in areas where mills were shut down. While closures were more common in the sharp decline of the 1950's they continued to occur in the 1960's, particularly in the New England area.

The outlook is for a continuation of the long-term decline, but at a slower rate. Because of the continued prevalence of many small mills with obsolete equipment, the industry will remain vulnerable to mass layoffs as plants are shut down during short-term periods of slackening demand.

JOBS FOR WOMEN

The textile industry has long been a source of abundant job opportunities for women. More than 425,000 women were employed in mills in 1966, about 45 percent of the industry's employees, compared with a ratio of 27 percent in all manufacturing.

Job opportunities for women are being affected by technological changes in winding, drawing, and packaging which may reduce unit labor requirements. On the other hand, as jobs previously considered too arduous are more highly mechanized, they become available to women workers.

Negro employment in the industry increased from a total of 25,000 in 1940 to 44,000 in 1960, despite the substantial decrease in overall textile employment. The proportion rose from 2.1 to 4.6 percent of total textile employment. In some southern centers, however, the ratio of Negro employment remained fairly stable until the mid-1960's. In South Carolina, one of the most important textile States, the average ratio of Negro textile employment for the last 30 years was less than 5 percent with little variation from year to year. In 1965, the proportion rose to slightly over 6 percent (still below the 1925 ratio), but in 1966 it jumped to 10 percent.

Although the generally low ratio of Negroes in southern textile mills reflects social and economic factors, there is evidence that some of these conditions are changing. Generally, white men and women sought jobs in southern textile mills because wages were higher than in many other low-paying local industries. Moreover, since many leading southern industries employed only a small proportion of women workers, the textile industry stood out as an important source of jobs for white women. When white male labor was not available, as in the 1940-45 period, white women capable of holding textile jobs were hired rather than Negro men. (See table 3.)

TABLE 3.—EMPLOYMENT CHANGES IN TEXTILE INDUSTRY OF SOUTH CAROLINA, BY SEX AND COLOR, 1940-65
[In thousands]

Period	Change in textile employment			
	Total	White men	White women	Negroes
1940-45.....	16.8	-0.8	15.7	1.8
1945-50.....	15.0	15.2	-0.6	.5
1950-55.....	2.6	1.9	0.9	-0.1
1955-60.....	-4.3	0.6	-4.8	-0.2
1960-65.....	10.4	3.6	4.4	2.5

Source: Annual Reports of the Department of Labor of South Carolina, 1940-65.

In recent years, the textile industry has had to compete for male labor with higher paying industries which have moved into the South. Moreover, employment opportunities, other than in textile mills, have become available to white women. Between 1960 and 1965, only 25 percent of the net increase in female employment in South Carolina went into textile mills; between 1940 and 1945, about 80 percent had gone into textile mills. The shortage of white women workers may be one reason for the increase in Negro employment in South Carolina in the mid-1960's.

Another factor in the improvement of the Negroes' position in textile employment of the South is that the community-work relationship is changing. The isolation from large urban centers of the socially cohesive mill communities and their dependence on the mill is lessening. These factors have tended to restrict Negro mill employment. Greater mechanization, on the other hand, tends to reduce demand for the unskilled workers (the major Negro occupational group today) and may adversely affect opportunities for Negro workers in the future.