

The Radium Girls

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Group Website

As the topic application of NHD rolled around in early October, we didn't have a strong grasp as to what our topic would be about. One of our moms, who worked in the medical field, proposed the idea of medical corruption, something that she has seen become heavily discouraged by legislation over the years. We took that idea and stumbled upon the Radium Girls, a group of women who seemed to embody the essence of fighting against a corrupt system.

Not only did we come to learn that these women were denied human rights in workspaces, but also that they were denied due process by government bodies. What led us to find this information was the Raymond Berry Micro Reels, which we found in the Library of Congress. Berry was a lawyer who represented countless Radium Girls in their lawsuits against their employer, the USRC. These reels condensed Berry's research for the trial of the Radium Girls into one place, ranging from letters between USRC officials and doctors of the Radium Girls to primary newspapers sympathizing with the predicament of the Radium Girls.

Another prominent source we used was medical journals that were written in the early 20th century on the effects of radium. We found that beginning before the 1920s, medical journals boasted about the youthful effects of radium. However, as time went on, the amount of doctors raising suspicions against these claims grew exponentially. This helped us gain a perspective on how radium companies chose to ignore the cries of concern regarding the unprotected use of radium in factories. With a plethora of primary sources containing detailed understandings of the Radium Girls, our next hurdle was in the website.

We prioritized a system that allowed both people to contribute to the website design. By utilizing the online platform Canva, both partners were able to experiment with aesthetics and contribute to the website organization and layout ideas even though only one of us had learned

how to maneuver the website builder. Ultimately, Canva allowed both of us to contribute in both research and website aspects.

Overall, this topic exposed us to the blatant injustices of the industrial, medical, and government industries during the early 20th century. We found that respectable doctors altered their medical testimonies and published work to support the agenda of the radium industry. They did this not to protect its employees, but to make profit— something that would be hampered with the extra expenses of protection for employees handling radium. Even with many young Radium Girls dying just years after beginning their dial painting, and many other physicians attesting to the unsafe working conditions present in USRC factories, government bodies such as the US Department of Labor took no steps in investigating the disturbing claims.

Ultimately, after a hard-won trial, Radium Girls paved the way for occupational safety by making all industrial diseases compensable and laying the foundation for government organizations that specialize in advocating for the health and safety of industrial workers.