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Sven Beckert's "Empire of Cotton" has received widespread acclaim from prominent publications. Reviewers have described the book as sweeping, ambitious, and disturbing; a transformative study that challenges readers' understanding of modern history and class position. Critics have praised Beckert's comprehensive narrative, which sheds light on the complex impact of the cotton trade on various societies, as well as his use of primary and secondary sources. The writing has been described as elegant, with overviews alternating between international trends and memorable anecdotes. Scholars and general readers alike are urged to devour this deeply researched and engagingly written book that offers new insights into global capitalism's relentless expansion. Sven Beckert's latest work is a meticulously researched and thought-provoking exploration of the cotton economy in early modern capitalism. Heavily documented with primary sources, this book provides a unique perspective on the often-overlooked lives of millions of workers who toiled on cotton plantations and farms worldwide. Beckert skillfully weaves together historical narratives, shedding light on the complex relationships between colonialism, slavery, and industrialization. A valuable contribution to the field of capitalism studies, Beckert's work offers a nuanced understanding of how this economic system was shaped by the experiences of its most vulnerable members. By examining the lives of ordinary workers, such as Ellen Hootton, who defied convention to leave behind written records, Beckert humanizes an era often reduced to abstract concepts. Through his masterful storytelling and rigorous scholarship, Beckert reminds us that global history is not just a series of events, but also the stories of individuals who shaped it. In June 1833, Ellen, only ten years old at the time, was summoned before His Majesty's Factory Inquiry Commission to investigate child labor in British textile mills. As a two-year veteran of the cotton mill, Ellen had already gained experience as a seasoned worker, despite being just a young girl. The commission, determined to discredit her claims, questioned Ellen, her mother Mary, and their overseer William Swanton, along with factory manager John Finch. However, despite their efforts to downplay the situation, it became clear that Ellen's assertions were largely true: she was the only child of a single mother, Mary Hootton, who struggled to make ends meet as a handloom weaver. As the sole breadwinner for her family, Ellen had been forced to work in the factory from a young age, initially unpaid, before earning a meager income to supplement her mother's earnings. When asked about her working day, Ellen described it as starting at 5:30 am and ending at 8 pm, with two breaks. She explained that she worked alongside 25 others, including three adults and the rest children, repairing and re-knotting broken threads on a mule machine. The tedious job required constant attention, and failure to finish tasks led to costly errors. Ellen reported being beaten by their overseer, Swanton, until her head was sore from his hands. Despite the abuse, Mary Hootton approved of corporal punishment and begged Swanton to keep Ellen working despite her troubles. Ellen Hootton's life serves as a stark reminder of the harsh realities faced by workers in the cotton manufacturing industry. Despite her courage in fighting back with a stick, her story remains largely unknown to this day. Yet, it is essential to acknowledge her significance in the world of cotton production, as without her labor and that of millions of others, the empire of cotton would not have been built. The violence inflicted upon workers was often subtle yet suffocating, driven by economic desperation that lured people into factories where they spent their lives in servitude. The experience of Ellen Hootton's generation was mirrored by countless others who toiled away in factories, producing cotton thread and cloth. The mobilization of women, children, and men to work in these settings is a testament to the human spirit's capacity for resilience. The sheer scale of this phenomenon, where thousands of workers walked to and from their places of labor each day, was awe-inspiring. From the narrow paths of the Vosges to the crowded streets of Manchester, people were drawn into this world of machine production, driven by poverty and exploitation. The lives of these workers were marked by extreme hardship, with discipline maintained through petty fines and forced forfeitures of contracts. The struggles faced by Ellen Hootton and her contemporaries remain a powerful reminder of the importance of acknowledging and honoring their stories. As the Industrial Revolution dawned in 1786, a staggering 119 workers fled, 65 lost their lives, and 96 were forced back into servitude or returned to their original owners. This marked the beginning of William Blake's "dark satanic mill" era, where workers toiled in massive brick buildings, often sweltering in heat and humidity, amidst deafening noise. They labored tirelessly, lived in poverty, and perished young. Leone Levi's 1863 observation rings true: "Behold the ranks of thousands of operatives all steadily working; behold how every minute of time, every yard of space, every practiced eye, every dexterous finger, every inventive mind is at high-pressure service." The importance and revolutionary nature of this new labor organization cannot be overstated. Today, we take this system for granted: most people earn a living by selling their labor for a set number of hours, receiving payment that allows them to purchase necessities. We also assume machines dictate the pace of human activity. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the notion of exchanging labor power for wages was rare, especially in manufacturing. The rhythm of work was governed by factors like climate, custom, and nature's cycles rather than machines. People worked due to slavery, feudal obligations, or subsistence farming on land they owned or had some rights to. The emergence of cotton manufacturing marked a fundamental shift. Cotton production relied on convincing, enticing, or forcing people to abandon centuries-old life rhythms and join the factory proletariat. While machines were remarkable, this change in work rhythm would prove more consequential. As Ellen Hooton and countless others entered the factories, they unknowingly gazed into the future of industrial capitalism – the very system their labor was building.