

Examining Crowd Work and Gig Work Through The Historical Lens of Piecework

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A New Form of Work: On-Demand Labor

- Crowdsourcing



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upwork

- Gig work

UBER

handy

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- How far can work be decomposed into smaller microtasks?
- What will work and the place of work look like for workers?

Piecework as a lens to understand on-demand work

A (*quick*) Primer on Piecework

- Payment made for *output*, rather than for *time*

An Example: Pieceworkers at the turn of the 20th century



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- Piecework: Lack of instrumentation limited task decomposition
- Today? Tools and technology can track every move workers make
- We've hit upon what seems to be an atomic limit on decomposition — cognitive switching between tasks is becoming the main barrier

- If on-demand labor follows the same trajectory as piecework, what can we expect?

Future Directions

- If on-demand labor follows the same trajectory as piecework, what can we expect?
- If we can design the entire platforms of labor in ways we couldn't imagine a century ago, what can we do to affect different outcomes?

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