

Negative effects of the industrial revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



1834 in Lowell, Massachusetts; chants of “ Union is Power” could be heard as the young girls of Lowell Mills took to the streets to protest a wage cut of 15-20% to their already meager salaries. Banded together as one, with a common sense of companionship and unity bred from long hours of working side by side; the girls attempted to keep their earnings. An attempt that only ended in defeat, and the firing , of many. This is only a small example of the many indecencies done to society during the Industrial Revolution of America.

From 1824 to 1840 the Jacksonian Era raged in America, a period in time in which the “ common man” became the focal point of politics and the Industrial Revolution reared its head; changing the country economically as well as socially. In this time period The United States of America went from a mainly agricultural based economy to one that relied heavily on textiles and manufacturing. Several factors contributed to this occurrence: new technology, new fuel sources, advancements in transportation, a rise in immigration, and the creation of the telegraph which led to faster communication not only in America but also across the sea. Technological advancements were accompanied by a drastic rise in the population, not only had the average birth rate risen, immigration had added hundreds of thousands new residences in a relatively small period of time, mostly coming from Ireland and Germany.

In the mid-1840s Ireland was faced with the Potato Famine, an extreme drought that left more than two million dead. In an attempt to escape this condition, and find a country that could not only support them but in which they could also make a living, many Irish immigrated to America.

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Unfortunately, many of these immigrants reached the “land of plenty” with insufficient means and were forced to stay in the cities being unable to afford expanding westward into new territory, or even owning any land at all. Due to their financial situations, many Irish immigrants were taken advantage of by the “natives”. Boston was a good example of the abuse that occurred to the Irish. Landlords were known to divide former single family dwellings into inexpensive housing charging a single Irish family living in a nine by eleven foot room with poor ventilation, no water, unsanitary conditions, and no daylight for around \$1.50 a week.

The demand for housing was astronomical and the cramped, overpopulated conditions that stemmed from this need became a breeding place for diseases; especially cholera. Of all the Irish children born in Boston during this period, sixty percent did not live to see their sixth birthday, and the adult Irish lived an average of only six years after stepping off the boat into America. Most of this death and disease was simply caused by poor housing. A Boston Committee of International Health described an Irish slum as, “a perfect hive of human beings, without comforts and mostly without common necessities; in many cases huddled together like brutes, without regard for to age or sex or sense of decency. Under such circumstances, self-respect, forethought, all the high noble virtues soon die out, and sullen indifference and despair or disorder, intemperance and utter degradation reign supreme.”

Not only were the new Irish immigrants faced with horrible living conditions, they were also discriminated against heavily by the “native” Americans. The

Protestant population that could trace their origins all the way back to the earliest English settlers did not take very kindly to the newcomers. Not only were they stealing scarce jobs that were in high demand in their eyes, but they were also Catholics. Protestants were extremely against any religion that wasn't theirs, especially Catholics who were rumored to be cannibals among other things. It was this resentment that helped fund a strong nativist/ anti-Immigration movement and helped to later form the Know-Nothing Party. This discrimination along with the fear that the Irish immigrants would take much needed jobs led to the placement of "NINA" signs on many factories, or "No Irish Need Apply" .

Germans, the other major European nationality emigrating to America at this time, fared slightly better due to the fact that they arrived in North America in much better financial standings. However, they were still forced to deal with discrimination and were still forced down to the bottom of the social ladder. Many ended up pushing westward and keeping to themselves, forming German communities.

Women were another group that was greatly affected by the Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution farm women and girls made a living for their families; spinning yarn, weaving cloth, and making candles, soap, butter, and cheese. However, with the new technology in manufacturing goods, these women were displaced by factories that could produce the same products at a much quicker pace and at greater quantities. While these factories took away one part of their livelihood, they attempted to make up for it by offering employment to them, promising a

new economic independence and the ability to afford all of the manufactured products of the time.

This promise was misleading; the reality of the matter was that these “factory girls” typically worked long, grueling thirteen hour days, six days a week. They earned a meager salary, much below the male workers of those days, for limb-numbing, mind-draining, dangerous work in which the machinery could seriously or even fatally injure a girl if she made a mistake. On top of that, they were made to live in a small boarding house owned by their employers, carefully watched and held at a very strict time schedule that ran their lives leaving these young women with no free time. Their lives were lived from whistle to whistle, it’s blowing signaling when to wake up, eat breakfast, go to work, and every other aspect of their lives including going to church every Sunday. The factories also claimed that they would provide education for their young workers. However, this was generally meant to be done on the ladies own time that of which there was little. A young woman who worked in the Lowell Mills of Massachusetts in 1845 wrote about her living conditions, “Crowded into a small room, which contains three beds and six females, all possessing the “without end” tongue of women, what chance is there for studying?” Despite the constant restriction these women were set in a new environment far from home with no mother-like figure to guide them. These boarding houses provided plenty of temptations and the lack of guidance was surely an equation for trouble.

Another problem that arose with women in the workplace was the rearing of the next generation. Long hours in the factories, year after year, led to a

physically and emotional premature breakdown of these women. When it came time to raise their own children who were to be the next generation, many times they had to continue working or were ill after the added stress that child birth put on them. A young Lowell Mill girl simply known as Julianna commented that, " It has been remarked by some writer that the mother educates the man. Now, if this be a truth, as we believe it is, to a very great extent, what, we would ask, are we to expect, the same labor prevailing, will be the mental and intellectual character of the future generations of New England?" The Industrial Revolution which led to the employment of women completely disrupted the cult of domesticity that was in place at this time. Despite the fact that this cult of domesticity was almost necessary to the bringing up of children at this time, it was also something that most women wanted. They looked forward to raising their children at home; this was a society that was still predominantly family orientated.

A new way of looking at life was becoming prominent with the Industrial Revolution. The strive to make money in order to survive and obtain the luxuries now available to the general population through the new manufacturing technologies brought about the idea that money equaled happiness. That, " To get, and to have the reputation of possessing, is the ruling passion" (Bellows, Henry W. *The Influence of the Trading Spirit* , 1845) is the new American ideal. According to Henry W. Bellows , this new drive for material possessions and money was creating an anxiety in the people of America, making them fundamentally unhappy. The basic moralities that used to drive the nation were no longer, and the new need for material conquests had taken over creating an " every man for himself" environment.

In other countries in the world, happiness is as easy as maintaining a family business and making enough financially to support a family, but not so in America. Where work had driven American families to be gone from the home for most of the day and to neglect the family. This bred an unfortunate consequence of unhappiness during the Jacksonian period.

All of these factors can add up to and attribute to one of the most influential social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution; a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. Through the new market enterprise, those in charge continuously took advantage of the less fortunate, gaining wealth without fail. Whereas those who were poor only continued to become more so. This widening of the social gap was beneficial to none but the highest of classes leaving the majority to despair and strive to survive.

The Industrial Revolution from 1824 to 1840 was a time of drastic change. An influx of new immigrants, over population, new social roles for women, a new American ideal, and a widening gap between social classes were all unfortunate repercussions of this movement that drastically changed the way society ran for the worse. Creating a negative impact that categorizes this era and provides a building block for unrest in the Civil War.

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