

Example of essay on cultural changes in the late 19th and the early 20th century

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Introduction](#) \n \t
2. [Industrialization](#) \n \t
3. [Unionization](#) \n \t
4. [Technological Innovation](#) \n \t
5. [African Americans](#) \n \t
6. [Arts, Music, and Theatre](#) \n \t
7. [Conclusion](#) \n \t
8. [Work Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Introduction

The industrial revolution took place in England in the late 18th Century and early 19th century, but during that time, America was more dependent on hand labors and small businesses served the local market. Investors did not have the capital to serve a larger market and also the transportation was not developed to serve a larger market quickly and efficiently. From the 1930s onwards, there was more focus on building better transportation system, and a river transportation system started developing, followed by an increasing focus on railroad expansion. By the time the Civil War ended, already many thousands of miles of railroad were laid and many cities of the east and west were connected. After the Civil War, as the country began to settle down with its new social norms, investors became more confident in the American market and started investing heavily, which helped the industrial revolution

evolve (BCP 2014). The industrial revolution brought about a big social and cultural change in the American society. Social norms of the past started changing fast and the class and hierarchy system in the society started evaporating. This essay will discuss how the industrial revolution after the Civil War brought about a significant change in the American society and culture in the late 19th and the early 20th century.

Industrialization

The shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial nation took place in the USA during the 19th century. It took more than a century for the country to internalize the transition. The first phase of industrialization took place between the 1790s and 1830s, and continued through the American Civil War. Before the Civil War, the typical American industry was small in size. The industrial production capacity was limited as hand labor was widespread. Since most of the businesses served a small market, they lacked the capital required for expanding business. However, after the Civil War, the picture of the American industry changed drastically. Hand labor got replaced by machineries, increasing the production capacity of industry significantly. The newly built network of railways around the nation made it possible to distribute the finished goods and raw materials far and wide (AUC 2014). New products, according to the demand of the public, were developed, and businesses produced those products in large quantities. Bankers and investors fulfilled the need for capital investment for the business leaders to expand their business operations.

The industrial revolution resulted in substantial de-skilling over a period of

time. The demand for unskilled workers capable of running the machines increased, whereas the demand for skilled workers decreased. The increased production capacity of industry and business expansion created vast job opportunities. Due to absence of labor laws, mills, factories, and the industrial plants in order to fulfill the demand for large numbers of workers started recruiting children as labors. Children labors were high in demand as they were cheap and could easily slip into the tiny holes of the tight fitting machineries where adults could not reach (AUC 2014). The industrialization also led to a rapid increase in birth rates due to which women from the working class section were forced to work in the mills and factories for financial reasons.

Unionization

Urbanization

The industrial boom resulted in urbanization, drawing a vast number of people from the rural agricultural areas to cities for work in industries. Only 25% of the American lived in urban cities in 1870, but that grew to almost 50% by 1916. By 1920, most of the Americans started living in cities. There were only nine cities with population density more than 100, 000 in 1860, but by 1919, the number of cities with that much population increased to fifty (AUC 2014). Urbanization created a dichotomy in the living conditions between wealthy and poor. A small percentage of people with highly profitable businesses in the industrial cities accumulated enormous wealth, living a life of luxury. Due to the economic growth during industrialization, a large number of middle class people, who were either the owners of small

businesses or did white collar jobs in industries, lived a comfortable life.

However, the working class section, the laborers lived in squalor and abject poverty.

Technological Innovation

After the Civil War, the USA in the period between the late 19th and the early 20th centuries not only witnessed a transition from the agrarian economy to an industrial one, but also sequential technological innovations like the telephone, railroad, and automobiles. Americans began to increasingly rely on technologies like the electricity, railroad, and telecommunications for social and economic activities. Though the technology of the railroad systems was invented in the early 19th century, by the mid-19th century, the length of the railway tracks increased 3, 326 miles to 30, 600 miles (Cowan 1997, p. 115-117). Due to the increased railway networks around the country, it became feasible to transport goods easily from one place to another.

Alexander Graham Bell invented telephone in 1876 and founded the Bell Telephone Company. Within a period of 15 years, the number of phones leased by his company increased from 3, 000 to 260, 000, but at that time, telephone was an expensive affair, and mainly businesses and government had the affordability to maintain them. After the expiry of Bell's patent, many independent operators entered the telephone market, providing telephone services to middle-class and low-class households, including farmers, thereby driving the cost of owning telephones down. By 1920, the USA had 13 million phones catering telecommunication service to people (Cowan

1997, p. 161). Thomas Alva Edison invented incandescent bulb in 1880. The invention of incandescent bulb helped people illuminate their nights and made it possible to do a wide range of activities.

In the USA, the first automobile produced was a three horsepower car in 1900. However, it was Henry Ford who revolutionized the manufacturing process of automobiles by actualizing the industrial mass production through an assembly line operation. In 1908, he launched the Model T that could run on an engine of 20 horsepower. In the beginning of the automobile invention, it was a toy for the rich, but gradually, it became immensely popular among the general people because of the convenience and the freedom of travelling (University of Colorado 2014). Due to the increasing demand, automobiles became cheaper and came within the affordability of the middle class section.

African Americans

The industrial revolution touched the lives of the African Americans too. The majority of them lived in southern states, and after the industrial revolution, they flocked towards the northern cities. Between the period of 1910-1930, millions of African Americans migrated to northern cities like Washington DC, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, and New York. They suffered the worst condition possible. They faced racial discrimination and extreme poverty. The white immigrants were given more preference than the African Americans in the labor market (NHWM 2014). They were employed in the least desirable occupations and were paid lower than their white counterparts.

Arts, Music, and Theatre

The industrial revolution brought about a massive social change in the USA. The country evolved from a rural culture to a modern urban society. Mark Twain called the era of industrialization " the Gilded Age" in which the wealthy people developed the tendency to show off their assets. The mansions of newly rich Americans built in the style of European palaces were filled with European works of art, gaudy decorations, rare books and antique showpieces (AUC 2014). This culture reflected in the arts of the Gilded Age that from a limner tradition of portraiture transformed into an ostentatious display of fashion, elegance and wealth. The organization of theatre also went through a transformation. Earlier, the theatre had a few tables arranged in the theater room in front of the stage, allowing freedom for the audience to have their privacy and come and go as they pleased. However, the industrial revolution brought about a change in the theatre building. Due to the concentration of a large number people in the cities, the rural theaters were shut down, and new theaters were built around the city. These new theatres catered to a new form of entertainment, the music hall, which was more spaciouly built and could accommodate a large number of customers (The Theatre Trust 2014).

Conclusion

The period between the late 19th and the early 20th century was marked by a transition of the American society from an agrarian culture to an industrial economy. A huge change in the society happened as the overall requirement for the product increased, but the requirement of skilled labor reduced. Due

to the sudden growth of demand, the overall labor requirement went high. Due to the absence of labor laws, businesses exploited the system by employing children as cheap labors and making workers slog for more than 60 hours a week in a cramped dirty condition with no safety measures in place. As a result, unions formed and there were frequent conflicts between the management and labors, leading to violent outcome at times. At this time, the USA witnessed an array of technological innovations such as the expansion of railway networks, telecommunication, commercial electrical appliances and automobiles. The industrial revolution led to urbanization, which widened the gap between rich and poor. Due to the economic dichotomy, the rich people developed the tendency to show their riches, and the contemporary arts and music also reflected that trend. Overall, this was the period that caused huge developments in the USA, preparing it to become the superpower in the world.

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