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t, or just creating more barriers to entry for the average person? The effects of technological advancement differ depending on the level at which they are examined.

From an overall societal perspective, the technological advances of the past fifty years have made many, if not all, industries more efficient. However, on a more personal level the “digital divide” is a very real phenomenon accentuating the differences between the social classes. The implementation of personal computers provides a microcosm in which to examine the transition state American society is in with regard to technology.

On the surface, it is easy to see the barriers and inequalities created by technological advancement. In the early use of computer, the sheer issue of cost divided those who could increase their productivity with computer tracking and management and those who could not afford the equipment to remain competitive, the hallmark of the free market system. By advancing those with sufficient capital to modernize, while neutralizing those of more limited means, computers initially created greater barriers to financial success for increasing numbers of people. In the 1980s, personal computers began to find their way into the public education system, similar to the way combustion engines worked their way into public transportation forty years earlier. Similar to business, this was an issue of available funding, with the wealthier school districts able to provide more modern facilities and the poorer districts no computers at all. A limited number of students gaining access to technology fed the much-touted “digital divide,” which gave a new dimension to the educational inequality that still plagues the United States. Upper and middle class students gained access to the expanding computer

science field, while poorer students were left to the dwindling manufacturing professions and service industries. To this day, school systems in extreme rural and urban areas do not have the available funding to provide computer training to their students.

In addition, many students do not have access to a computer at home or a local library. This lack of exposure limits the opportunities of modern students in a much more dramatic way than it did their parents, as American society becomes more dependent on computers to organize and regulate daily life. Modern students and displaced workers without computer knowledge face a grave disadvantage during a job search or higher education. These obvious barriers to those of less economic means should not necessarily be seen as an indictment of technology or a refutation of the myriad benefits technological advancement has afforded the United States.

The technological revolution is a multi-layered process, with many of the forces involved possessing a longer time frame than those that initially created inequalities. The advent of computers can be seen as analogous to the advent of the printing press. Just as literacy proved to be a basis for evaluation the value of a prospective student or employee, so has computer literacy become such a measure today. Continuing the analogy, computers can also embody the great leveling device that early books provided. Whereas initial mass printing of the Bible invited people to defy clerics by coming to their own revelations regarding religion, so can the information age be a boon to freethinking.

Education, though biased in favor of those with means, cannot be reclaimed like other material assets. The same can be said of computer training and proficiency. If people with less economic opportunity can gain access to computers skills, these skills are accompanied by a chance at social mobility. As computers become more commonplace, which the current trend indicates, the barriers that they initially posed to the lower economic classes will slowly be decreased or eliminated. This stage of the technological revolution is as fundamental to societal advancement and efficiency as was widespread literacy replacing elitist control of all texts four hundred years ago. At this point, society must acknowledge the potential barrier that technology can create and work toward the equal access to technology that will foster growth and prosperity for all citizens, not just those with sufficient economic resources.