

Book review: daily life
in the united states,
1920-1940 essay



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Book Review: Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940 The way Americans lived their lives was drastically changed between the years of 1920 and 1940. Many different events and advances in technology happened within the country during this time period. Events such as the stock market crash in 1929, the dust bowl of the 1930's, and, due to an increase in urbanization, the uprising of major cities. Also advances in technology transpired, such as the invention of the radio and Henry Ford's assembly line.

These events and advances are all illustrated in great detail in the novel, Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940 by David E. Kyvig. His thesis explains that during the two decades, the American life style was changed in such a drastic way that it altered the manner in which the American people lived their everyday lives. Kyvig goes into immense detail about how these two decades changed Americans work and family life, as well as explaining in a great extent how the technological advances impacted the Americans everyday life.

All of this is acknowledged and is in place by means to support Kyvigs main thesis. Kyvig uses a couple different main approaches in applying his evidence to help support his thesis. The use of imagery is one of his main approaches. He uses authentic photographs that were taken during the different time periods that can now only be found in such places as the Library of Congress and the Nation Archives. The authenticity of these photographs really helps emphasize the truth behind what Kyvig is articulating in his thesis.

For instance, Kyvig uses a photograph from the National Archives of a tenant farmer's cabin in Harmony, Georgia (p. 15). By placing this authentic photograph in with his facts about the hardships of agriculture in rural America, it allows for more evidence that his facts are actually accurate and not just false statements. Another main approach of evidence that Kyvig uses to help support his thesis is the use of statistics from census that were taken during the decades. For example, Kyvig states, " In 1920, 56 percent of Southern tenant farmers were white. " (Kyvig, p. 5) By using actual statistics as evidence it helps illustrate the impact that the hardships of agriculture in rural America had on tenant farmers and especially in this case on white tenant farmers. Kyvigs use of both authentic photographs and census statistics helps better exemplify his statements as supporting evidence to his thesis. Technology advancements and innovations served as, in my opinion, the most drastic life changing factors during this time period. For instance, the invention of the assembly line had a major impact on American workers. In fact, " By the mid-1920s one of eight U.

S. workers was somehow involved in the production, sales, service, and fueling of automobiles. " (Kyvig, p. 28) This is a major primary source that Kyvig uses as evidence to support his thesis and to help portray the fact that this time period changed the way Americans lived their lives. Just the automobile in general, " significantly changed the way people worked, conducted their business, shopped for necessities and desires, and spent leisure time. " (Kyvig, p. 28) The automobile was unquestionably the most noteworthy of all new technologies that had gained popularity in the 1920s.

As a secondary source of evidence, there were other inventions that gained popularity as well, such as the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner, and the radio. But from these three the radio had the largest life style changing impact on the daily life of an American. The radio allowed the American people to become more informed with what was going on around them within the country. It allowed a “ nationwide community of people...” (Kyvig p. 72) , to share the same informative experience at the exact same time. The radio became a very large part of the everyday life of an American and it changed the way Americans spent their leisure time as well.

Families would sit down and listen to things such as sports and the “ Fireside Chats” hosted by President Roosevelt himself. Having the ability to be able to hear the president speak on the radio helped Americans become more informed in politics and in turn increased the popularity of President Roosevelt. Branching off from the invention of the radio came the add-on of sound in movie productions. Going to the movies became a very popular way to spend leisure time. In fact it had grown so much that it began to impact the adolescence culture in such a way that people would want to dress just like the movie stars.

Furthermore movie theatres became a popular way to spend leisure time throughout these two decades. Kyvig’s evidence used in his book compared to the evidence used in the textbook are both one in the same. The evidence that Kyvig uses in his book matches up parallel to the evidence that is used in the textbook. Both books state many topics in the same way, like how the automobile drastically changed the American peoples’ daily lives and how

the radio affected the popularity of President Roosevelt. Many of the subject matters also lined up well in comparison with the class lecture notes.

Concerns such as the agricultural in rural America, were maybe better explained in Kyvigs book but none the less had the same information explained in the textbook. Kyvigs thesis explains exactly what happened in the United States between the years of 1920-1940. The everyday life of an American citizen did significantly change due to many different events and innovations that had happened during these years and both books clearly articulate what had happened. In addition to the comparisons of these two books, both books address the same audience as well. The main audience that they address is the student audience.

No matter what age, scholars will read these books to learn and expand their knowledge of what happened in America. These books are very informative on American History and, for Kyvigs book, especially in the time period between the 1920s to the 1940s. These books would most likely be used to study from and/or do research papers on. Having aids such as an index, footnotes, and pictures in not only the textbook, but in Kyvigs novel as well increases the likely hood of addressing the scholar audience. Furthermore, the novel *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1940* by David E.

Kyvig is well worth reading. Though I would not recommend it just for the entertainment of reading, but would recommend it if someone were to be doing a research paper on the daily life of Americans between the years of 1920-1940. This novel is well informative in descriptive detail of how the everyday life of an American was and changed during the time period it was

written about. The uses of the many different statistics as well as the use of the authentic photographs increase its value as a tool of research. This novel is worth reading for expanding knowledge of the history of life in America.