

Myth of the happy yeoman summary

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



The 19th century was a period of rapid economic change and progression in the United States, not only for industry, but for the agrarian sector as well. The Industrial Revolution in America changed the economic identity of the farmer which coincided with the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian-based society becoming increasingly mythicized. Richard Hofstadter notes in his article "The Myth of the Happy Yeoman" that "the more commercial this [American] society became, the more reason it found to cling in imagination to the noncommercial agrarian values." The concept of the yeoman farmer had been doused with physical and moral righteousness since the colonial era; a quintessentially American ideal of the "honest, independent, healthy, happy human being." Thomas Jefferson had made this ideal the basis of American continental development, and the Whigs had used this ideal to elect Harrison/Tyler (and the idea used in many political campaigns thereafter), though it was soon overrun by "commercial realities" in the 19th century. It is true, Hofstadter notes, that the life of the happy yeoman was reality for many farmers during the colonial period and well into the 19th century, but those that were able to commercialize their practices took the opportunity. In the west (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan), the shift from self-sufficient to commercial farming was complete by 1850, and starting in 1840 many farm children migrated to the cities. Farming went from a way of life to a career as a result of industrialism in America, and with it the idea of the American yeoman went from reality to myth. Ironically, the "myth of the happy yeoman" was believed more widely as it had become more fictional. Throughout the Jacksonian-Era up to the early 20th century (and in some respects, today too) the "common man" (who was a self-sufficient farmer

living in a log cabin somewhere free from the corruption of city life) captivated the hearts of Americans as part of the country's " political folklore and nationalist ideology. " However, Technological advances in the late 19th century had brought an end to the yeoman, as he became a hero of the past, but had lost his place to urbanization, industrialism, and commercialism that had defined a new generation in the United States.