

Social class during victorian england history essay



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A person's social class during Victorian England determined many things during his or her lifetime, including education, medical treatment, and jobs. One of the things that were greatly affected by a person's social class was his or her education. The lower class citizens barely received any education at all, if they received any. The middle class citizen usually received education, but not very high quality education. The upper class citizens mostly received education and it was the top of the line. Another thing that was mainly affected by a person's social class was his or her job, when the lower class or the "working class" did the majority of the physical labor being paid hourly or daily. The middle class often performed the "mental" work and they were being paid either monthly or annually. The upper class did not usually have to work, and they did get paid from inherited land and their investments. Another thing that a person's social class affected was medicine. Lower class citizens got more illnesses because they were doing more physical labor, and when they got sick, the medical treatment they received was not as good, mainly because they were not able to pay for it. People in the middle class, who got sick less, also received better treatment. The upper class, when they got sick, received excellent medical treatment, because they were the higher priority, and they were able to pay more for it. All of these examples prove that a person's social class highly affected the life that person lived during Victorian England.

Boys of a good family without money went into middle class professional jobs. The boarding schools during this time were becoming more popular, because the grammar schools, which used to educate the boys, were becoming old. The thought of middle class education was that it was stupid

to put more than your income in to your child's education. There were three main things that were looked for in the education of a person's child. They were religious and moral principles, gentlemanly conduct, and then intellectual ability (Reader 34). The regular Victorian Era boy in the middle class would not have a great education unless he went to a public school. The grammar schools at this time were not a very good education (Avery 126).

The farmers, who were in the lower class during Victorian England, thought that it was good to have the education of his daughter polished up a little bit. They also saw little benefit in book learning for boys, especially if it was expensive, and they thought that they could do a better job (Reader 58). The boarding schools for the lower class boys were called "county schools". To keep the costs down for these schools, the boys lived in places called "hostels" and ate in one central area. These schools were set up for farmers, but not by farmers. Even though they thought they were paying a good price for the education of their boys, the farmers thought they could do a better job of teaching them.

The lower class included people who did physical labor and were either paid hourly or daily. The middle class population was the people who did the "clean" work and were paid monthly or annually. The upper class did not need to work; their income came from the inherited lands and investments ("Victorian England"). The middle class people made about three hundred to eight hundred pounds annually. The lower middle class people made about one hundred and fifty to three hundred pound annually.

The middle class during Victorian England was very powerful. The middle class was dominated by men and the masculine principle (Swisher 212). They were associated with the growth of cities and the expansion of the economy. Also, the diversity of the middle class made it very difficult to get a proper definition for the middle class and the economic boundaries for the middle class often were not clear. The middle class also had a very successful time in Victorian England. By today's standards, the middle class of Victorian England would be equal to the upper class of the 21st century ("Victorian Era Social Classes").

The lower class had become completely shut from the political process. They were a very large class, and often very angry at anybody in the middle or upper class. Their working conditions were poor and made for a lot of illness (Miller). They all had a very rough life to live. The Industrial Revolution took the lower class before and left them without jobs, which put them in an even worse part of poverty and an even lower class that sometimes people called the "under" class and these people would be called paupers ("Victorian Era Social Classes"). One of the worst parts for the lower class families was that they were so poor that they needed their own children to go work for them so they could have more money to support their family. Often, the families did have to crowd into one room just to get some space to rest.

The law of Victorian England had shifted into a class pattern. The working men lost their traditional rights that they had before Victorian England. Also, they had their independent actions constrained (Morgan 437). Some of the workers during Victorian England, that would be equal in skill to another person in their class, would both be doing the same job, but one might

prosper, while the other might not do well at all. Also, for some of the lower classes, the living conditions for them were very unstable, and very quickly, if they lost a little money, their living conditions could greatly decrease (Pugh 33).

The Victorian upper class consisted of the king and queen, aristocrats, nobles, dukes, and other wealthy families of the Victorian court. They were in a powerful position giving authority and had much better living conditions than anybody else. The upper class was like a royal class which was a lot different from the middle and lower class, which was roughly based of the income you had. Most of the aristocrats did not need to work in the other classes, but they had received their money from previous generations, who had saved money up for their children to have, so they would never be short of money ("Victorian Era Social Classes"). There were a number of aristocrats who managed large industries like the shipping or mining industry. Also, they got the best tutors to provide education to their children. The fact that they were a part of the "royal" class gave them an advantage over everything just because of the title that they had.

During Victorian England, the middle class was the most populated class of all the classes. They were next in ranking to the royal class. The Victorian Era provided a very successful time period for the middle class. Some jobs for the middle class citizens during Victorian England were teachers and doctors. Other people in the middle class owned large businesses and they became very rich. These rich people, if they had no relevance to royalty, had been too equated to the middle class, even if they were very rich. The

middle class before the start of Victorian Era was a very small class, and over the time period of the Victorian Era it grew to be very large.

The Industrial Revolution greatly changed the way of the life for the middle class citizens by opening up many more job opportunities for the lower and middle class, so you could make a decent amount of money and have a decent way of living life. This had a very positive impact on the education of children in two ways. The first way was by that people had gotten more money, so now they had the money to buy an education for their children. The other way was by the parents were making enough money to support the family by themselves, so they no longer needed their children to work and they had time to be educated. The middle class was getting many opportunities to improve their social status. Another thing that affected the middle class was that women had started to work outside their own homes. The lower class was the lowest among the social hierarchy. Also like the middle class, the lower class was a very large class and was very populated. ("Victorian Era Social Classes"). They were very hostile to the upper and middle classes. The Industrial Revolution was beneficial to the middle class, but created a lot of problems for the lower class. They were categorized as skilled workers or unskilled workers. The skilled workers got an opportunity to work in the factories and improve their way of life and living conditions. The unskilled workers were placed way below the skilled workers in the social scale and were vulnerable to exploitation ("Victorian Era Social Classes"). The skilled workers became very powerful when they created their own trade unions.

The working class was the worst affected class in the Victorian Era. Another problem that was faced by the lower class was immigration. Other people were migrating to England and creating less job opportunities for all the people living in the lower class. This affected the wages that the lower class people received and the people could barely support themselves. Their lack of money in turn brought in a negligible food supply. If the father of the family died, they meant the family would mostly be without a house and would have to move into a public housing area or they were forced to live on the streets. The conditions were so bad for the lower class that if there was not enough money for the family to support itself and the children had to go to work, sometimes they would be separated from their parents while they were working.

All of these things had a very negative impact on their lives. The lack of education that the children received resulted in that the fate of their lives was decided before they even became an adult ("Victorian Era Social Class"). They ended up working very dirty and dangerous jobs. The class that was below the lower class was often called the under class or the "paupers". They were ranked below the lower class because they lived in total poverty. These people were the total low of all of society.

During the Victorian Era, the social class system of that time rigidly defined the role of women. There were four main classes that the women were divided into they were: gentry, middle class, upper working class, and the lower working class. They were only to stay in the standards of this class and if they were to take the standards of another class, it was considered a very high offense ("Women of Victorian England").

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The highest class for the women was the gentry and nobility class. They were the ones who inherited all their wealth. To a normal person, a person might think that a woman in this class would do very little, but they actually did a lot. This lifestyle left ample time for leisure. Social balls and other parties were a very often occurrence. Dancing was one of the favorite things for the upper class women and men ("Women of Victorian England"). An unmarried woman of this class often spent a lot of time with other unmarried women of their same social class. When a woman did get married though, she had to manage the house and keep it clean, so she had much less time to spend talking with her friends. Although her life might seem much easier than a middle or lower class women, it was not always the case. All of the land and money was inherited by the oldest son, and this meant that it would be very rare for an unmarried woman to inherit the land and money of the death of her father. As a result of this, some mothers and daughters would be left poor after the death of their husband or father ("Women of Victorian England").

The next highest class that a woman would have a role in would be the middle class. The life of a middle class woman was similar to the life of an upper class woman, but it was not as luxurious as an upper class woman's life. Women of Victorian England heavily relied on "marrying up". This was where a woman would attempt to marry a man what was of higher social class than she was. The middle class was a very large class and it had a very broad area of people ("Women of Victorian England"). Because of that, it depended not on how much money one had, but how much money one made. Also, that made it so that the role of women varied greatly from

family to different family. For instance, one woman would work with the family business, while another woman might have the life of some upper class women, and not have to work much at all.

The third class that women played a role in was the “ upper” working class, or the “ upper” lower class. These people worked easier jobs that required thinking, but were still above the people who performed all of the physical labor. These women could often be found working jobs such as a bookkeeper or a school teacher. Sometimes women would be put into this class from the upper class, after the death of a father or brother and they had to starting working for their money again (“ Women of Victorian England”).

The fourth and final class that women had a role in was the “ lower” working class. This was mainly the very poor unmarried women of this time. After the New Poor Act, most women were pronounced “ able-bodied” and were forced to move alongside with the other lower class men, like in the factories of this time. Another option for lower working class women during this time period for a job was domestic service (“ Women of Victorian England”). There were many job opportunities for domestic service, because even the lowest families of the middle class had at least one or two domestic servants, so there was a lot of opportunity for a job there. The live for a domestic service was not a very good one, because they were not allowed to socialize when they were working, while if someone worked at factories people could socialize, because there were more people to socialize with. This was a very brutal job though, where they had to work seven days a week, twelve hours a day, while factories workers usually worked six days, ten hours a day (“ Women of Victorian England”).

When the women's suffrage movement came around during the late end of the Victorian Era, most women welcomed it because previously they had a lot of restrictions put on them, and now they were getting more freedom and independence. The rough placements of the divisions between the classes caused women to have a very rough lifespan, and she did not get many choices, often only getting to do what was given to her before she even got to decide what she wanted ("Women of Victorian England").

The changes that were brought by the industrial revolution also impacted the leisure activities during Victorian England. These changes mainly affected the lower and middle classes, but they did affect the upper class a little. During this time, a woman was thought of as a symbol of her husband's wealth. The less work that his wife had to do, it was thought that the more wealthy he was, because he could hire more people to do the work for her, instead of her actually doing the work. Also, another thing that showed a man's wealth was the wardrobe of his wife (Johnson). The more clothes she had, and the more obsessed she was with grooming, showed his wealth, but also showed her reliance on him financially. Women during this time enjoyed activities out of their own household, which other class women could not enjoy. Some of the things that they liked to do include: trips to the seaside, playing croquet, bicycling, and they also enjoyed going ice skating (Johnson). Women also began to enjoy accompanying their husbands on their hunting trips, once they realized that it was only for the upper class, and while hunting, there was no mingling between the upper class and the lower and working classes. Women in the upper class, unlike women in the middle

class, had no motivation to spend time with the lower classes, so they just stayed within their own respective classes (Johnson).

The middle class citizens built their leisure activities from the activities that the upper class citizens had previously done. They built their own social groups, and they participated in much as the same sports as the upper class such as cricket, lawn tennis, and croquet (Johnson). Many women took the opportunity and participated in outdoor activities that allowed them to flirt with men, if they had already married. One of the best activities that women had participated in to flirt with young men was ice skating. This brought around the saying “ fresh air and flirtation in good combination” (Johnson). Almost all of the single women that participated in leisure activities used most the time to try to flirt, and also to try to find their suitable husband. Women, who left their house without their suitable chaperones, or husbands, were often thought upon as prostitutes and it was thought as socially unacceptable (Johnson). Even though there was the thought of “ rational recreation” which was meant to bring classes together, it was not meant to bring the genders together. The only activities that were meant to bring the genders together were music halls, or theaters (Johnson). However, the theaters were overly crowded by what were thought to be prostitutes at this time, so they were not very good grounds for meeting between single men and women.

The working class were the worst effected by the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian Era. They were very limited by the activities that they could participate, because they had to work much more, and they made much less money (Johnson). The women in the working class had almost no leisure time

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because the men had total control of their money to spend, and they often spent it, and the women were rarely allowed to participate in leisure activities outside of their household (Johnson).

The Industrial Revolution brought a lot of changes to the lower class family working structure during Victorian England. During the Victorian Era, the men were the top of the household and they ran the whole house, and while the men were at work, the women ran the house and took care of the children and their other household duties, but with the need for more income, women had to go to work, and since there was no place for the children to go they had to work with their mothers, but it was also thought as another plus because the children would bring in even more income than just the mothers would make alone. This put a big burden on the wives because not only were they expected to go work at a factory, but at the same time they were still expected to take care of the household. Also, the revolution brought a very big change to the average workweek. The six day with twelve hours a day workweek began to evolve into a five day workweek, with a half day on Saturdays. During this time, the middle class was pushing for an increase for recognized holidays by their employers. Some acts like the Factory Acts of 1867 and 1874 made it that the workers were always given holidays on Christmas and Good Friday (Johnson). Some other factors that led to more leisure activities were the Great Exhibition and rational recreation. The Great Exhibition was an event that had introduced the middle and working class to trains, and it was like a world's fair. The idea of trains was a very new thought to the lower and middle class, and they were only used to the idea that they had to stay in their respective village or town.

Rational recreation was the middle class' idea of the recreation of the working class. Most of their time spent during rational recreation was spent at either bars or pubs (Johnson). Some of the other activities during rational recreation that weren't at bars or pubs were singing, drama, piano, and other activities that were thought to be classier. These were mainly activities that were meant to bring the middle and working class together. Some of the men in the working class thought that if the women were given a holiday from the factory, they were not to use it to go out and have fun, but they were supposed to stay home and do work around the house and do the chores that they were unable to do during the week. If they didn't want to do their household work while on their holiday, the men's response was that either they didn't get to have leisure activities at all, or that the men were not going to help out when the women needed help doing their chores (Johnson).

These are all many examples that a person's social class during the Victorian Era greatly determined what type of lifestyle that a person had and the types of jobs they had, the amount of education they received, and the types of activities they were allowed to do with the free time they had while they were not working.