

The Effects of Industrialization in the United States

By Sarah Collinge

The Factory System

The Industrial Revolution was a time when new inventions led to the growth of industry in both Great Britain and the United States. These new inventions allowed products to be made more quickly and in larger quantities for less money.

With these new inventions came the need for large mills where people and machines could work together on assembly lines to produce large amounts of goods. An English factory worker named Samuel Slater became very interested in this factory system. He dreamed of making his fortune by bringing this factory system to the United States. He used his time working in the British textile industry to memorize the details of the factory's machines.

In 1789, Slater immigrated to the newly independent United States. Slater built the first American textile mill in 1791 and became known as the "father of the American factory system."

As a result of the new factory system, families moved from their rural farms into the cities to work. They lived in tenement housing. Cities grew, and the United States became a more urban society.

Cheap Labor

As America's economy boomed, the need for cheap labor to run the mines, factories, and mills increased. An industrialist named Francis Cabot Lowell found a solution. Lowell hired young women to work in his mill. He paid them \$2.00 per week, which was less than he paid men. The young women lived in cramped boardinghouses and worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days.

At the same time, more than two million children were also being used as cheap labor. The use of machinery in factories created the need for unskilled workers. Industrialists could use children for unskilled jobs and pay them less than an adult wage. As a result, many adults could not find work because children took jobs. Instead of going to school and getting an education, children were working in factories, mills, and mines.

The Cotton Industry and Slavery

In 1793, a man named Eli Whitney invented a machine that would quickly clean raw cotton. This invention became known as the cotton gin ('gin' is short for engine). With the cotton gin, two people could clean what it once took one hundred people to clean.

Some people believe Whitney had hoped the invention of the cotton gin would reduce the need for slaves on plantations. In fact, slavery increased as a result of his invention. Cotton became a more profitable crop, and plantation owners expanded their production of cotton. This increased the need for slaves to be used as planters and harvesters of the crop. By 1810, there were 1.2 million slaves in the United States.

Slavery spread to the new western territories where new cotton fields were being planted. From 1790 to 1810, nearly 100,000 slaves were forced westward. Slaves continued to be threatened by separation from loved ones.

The success of cotton made it difficult for slaves to purchase their freedom like Venture Smith had done in 1765. During this time, few slave owners gifted slaves their freedom. Those who had escaped slavery were now in danger of being kidnapped or sold back into slavery. In 1793, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed. This allowed any white person to claim a black person was a fugitive and send them back into a life of bondage.

Industrialization

The industrialization of America had both positive and negative effects on society. The Industrial Revolution brought a flood of immigrants to the United States, contributing to the cultural diversity of our country. Early inventions of the Industrial Revolution led to advances in transportation and technology. At the same time, unfair wages, hazardous working conditions, and the exploitation of minorities and children caused poverty, illiteracy, and conflict.

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